University of Szeged
Institute of English and American Studies

Kérchy Anna

Self-freakings. Body-Texts in Angela Carter's Trilogy

Feminist Grotesque Bodies, Fictionalized Identities, and Somatized Narratives in *The Passion of New Eve*, *Nights at the Circus*, and *Wise Children*

Consultants:
Dr. Resch Béláné Dr. Marinovich Sarolta
Dr. Barát Erzsébet

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Table of Contents

I. Introduction

"A universal cast of two-headed dogs, dwarfs, alligator men, bearded ladies and giants in leopard-skin loin clothes reveal their singularities in the sideshows and, wherever they come from, they share the sullen glamour of deformity, an internationality which acknowledges no geographic boundaries. Here, the grotesque is the order of the day." (Carter 1997, 42)

"Perhaps the mission of those who love mankind is to make people laugh at the truth, to make truth laugh, because the only truth lies in learning to free ourselves from the insane passion of truth." (Eco 1983, 491)

1. Prologue: Making a Difference from the Margins

Angela Carter's self-created authorial persona[1] has always been associated with a fantastic being, a "spell-binder" (Sage 1994a, 1), a "Fairy Godmother," a "friendly witch," a "very good wizard" (Margaret Atwood, J. G. Ballard, Salman Rushdie in Gamble 1997, 131), a ravishing yet funny grotesque figure, a loquacious "yarn-spinner, mother Goose," a "wolf in Grandma's nightcap" (Sage 1994b, 2). She has been imagined as a role-playing artist who never ceases to present playfully performative narratives characterised by a mocking "self-masking" resulting from polyphonic or ventriloquist voices, a carnivalesque imbroglio of genres and styles, and a subversively 'embodied text' fuelled by the transgressive, masquerading, metamorphic bodies at the heart of her fiction. As if Carter cooked in the witch-cauldron of the womanwriter a magic potion with her own recipe, in her fiction she fuses incompatible bodies (creating interim figures as the birdwoman, the werewolf, the she-man or the coquette hags), she mingles contradictory or self-destabilising narrative voices, and blends non-canonised minor, mutant genres, 'lesser,' hybrid texts creating a combination of magic (and) realism, adult fairy tale, feminist romance, demythologised high and re-imagined popular myths, (self-)ironically polemic culture-critical manifesto, fictional autobiography and imaginary historiography, fantastic literature playing with readerly hesitation, rewritten female Gothic fused with revisited female *Bildungsroman* or picaras' picaresque, erotic poetry mixed with nursery rhyme, all seasoned with a pinch of salt to her own taste. In the end, she finally serves up to her readers a corpus of her own, a *gourmet*'s dish, the uniquely flavoured, trademark-Carterian text: grotesque, spectacular and delicious. Fond of culinary metaphors, Carter claimed pointing smiling to her marvellous melange: "Is there a definite recipe for potato soup? [...] This is how *I* make potato soup!" (Sage 1994b, 2).

Carter's fantastic novelistic dishes "are served" deliberately in the darkest corners of the kitchen. Her fiction's predilection for liminal settings, borderline conditions (Gamble 1997,

6), ahistorical temporality, grotesque characters and freaked corporealities relocate the neglected margin as the subversive kernel of a relativized[2] system.

The patriarchal system itself is disclosed as a socially constituted, ideologically infiltrated, hegemonic and cannibalistic structure that aggressively devours but fails to digest, and is therefore fated to regurgitate otherness. Otherness, in turn, becomes enabled to make a 'different' difference, precluding the scapegoating othering of difference, and enhancing new, alternative ways of reading the world and ourselves by "starting out on the side of [the conventionally exluded] freak" (Russo 1996, 12), re-interpreted as autonomous alterity. Carter's fantastic world is that of the others occupying and destabilizing the centre and praising the troubling and tempting space 'in-between.' Her scenes, such as the toyshop, the junkshop, the fairground, the circus, the masquerade, the music-hall or the theatre, can be regarded as spectacular, open spaces of a topsy-turvy world, a carnivalesque topography or a subversive, feminist geography. At the same time, she is fond of an epiphanic temporality, her stories take place on New Year's Eve, at equinox, solstice, the turn of the century or (re)birthdays, in time zones becoming magical spaces where her leitmotif Grandfather clock is stopped by her heroines who aim to denounce Father Time, to resist, confuse and seduce History, Time, and Death. Her favourite themes feature destabilized identity categories, blurred gender boundaries, violations of human anatomy's frontiers, fantastic body transformations, adolescence and menopause, physical development and decomposition, revelatory journeys and the suspension of space and time. Her fantastic characters inhabit, to an almost maniac extent, grotesque bodies and display disturbing corporealities, ranging from the wolfish Red Riding Hood and the tender wolf, through the distorted faced Beauty, and the pregnant man, to the murderous clown, the aerial giantess, and the set of licentious septuagenarian twin seductresses.

Thus, Carter's fiction undertakes a complex feminist project aiming to reveal that the limits entail transgression. The regulatory system inherently creates its supplementary space elsewhere, the compulsory ingredients of the main dish generate surprisingly piquant by-flavours. Father's public House hides and highlights the private realm of the maternalized kitchen as its nurturing or poisonously annihilating centre, while the stereotypically feminized writings, incorporated by the paternal-filial literary tradition and canon, inspire alternatively empowering other wor(l)ds for women becoming authors of their own liking.

Although throughout the main body of the study I engage in a 'text-obsessed' close-reading of Carter's three novels, the 1977 *The Passion of New Eve* (*PNE*), the 1984 *Nights at the Circus* (*NC*) and the 1992 *Wise Children* (*WC*),[3] in order to realize my ultimate objective

of analysing the ideological constructions and subversive de/reconstructions of Body, Text, Self and Femininity in Carterian fictional worlds, through identifying Carter's textual strategies of 'self-freaking', grotesque corporeal-, narrative- and identity-performances, in the followings I provide a brief social and cultural contextualisation of Carter's oeuvre.

2. A Brief Introduction to Carter's Oeuvre. Contexts, Contacts and Contrasts.

Angela Carter was born in 1940 and died in 1992, in London. A prolific writer, she published nine novels (*Shadow Dance* (1966), *The Magic Toyshop* (1967, John Llewellyn Rhys Prize), *Several Perceptions* (1968, Somerset Maugham Award), *Heroes and Villains* (1969), *Love* (1971), *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* (1972), *Passion of New Eve* (1977), *Nights at the Circus* (1984, James Tait Black Memorial Prize), and *Wise Children* (1991)), four collections of short stories (*The Bloody Chamber* (1979, Cheltenham Festival of Literature Award), *Fireworks: Nine Profane Pieces* (1984), *Black Venus* (1985), *American Ghosts and Old World Wonders* (1993)), a polemic piece in cultural history entitled *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography* (1979) , five children's books (*Miss Z, the Dark Young Lady* (1970), *The Donkey Prince* (1970), *Comic and Curious Cats* (1979), *The Music People* (1980), *Moonshadow* (1984), two collections of journalism (*Nothing Sacred* (1982), *Expletives Deleted* (1992)), a volume of poetry (*Unicorn* (1966)), and a volume of radio plays (*Come unto These Yellow Sands* (1985). She translated the fairy stories of Charles Perrault, edited collections of fairy and folk tales (*Sleeping Beauty and Other Favorite Fairy Tales* (1984), *Don't Bet on the Prince: Contemporary Feminist Fairy Tales in North America and Europe* (1987), *Old Wives' Fairy Tale Book* (1990), *The Second Virago Book of Fairy Tales* (1992)), as well as *Wayward Girls and Wicked Women: An Anthology of Subversive Stories* (1986). She also wrote the screenplays for *The Magic Toyshop*, based on her novel of same title (Granada Television Productions, 1989) and for the 1984 film *The Company of Wolves*, directed by Neil Jordan and inspired by her 'wolf-tales.' An additional volume of her collected writings and journalism (*Shaking a Leg* (1997)), and her complete short stories (*Burning Your Boats* (1996)) were published only after her death.

The scope of Carter's writings is breathtaking. Her oeuvre is characterized by a delighting diversity, and each of her texts resists conventionally canonized categories. As Lorna Sage writes of her, "she belongs among the fabulists and tale-spinners, the mockers and speculators and iconoclasts and utopians, [s]he was born subversive" (Sage 1994a, 1). Despite her singularity, Carter shares strategies with a generation of women writers, who started their careers in the late sixties or early seventies, and who are tellingly referred to in Lorna Sage's

Women in the House of Fiction, a study on post-war women novelists, as the generation that is "Divided amongst Ourselves" (Sage 1992, 153). In this group Angela Carter enjoys the company of Fay Weldon, Margaret Atwood, Toni Morrison, and Joyce Carol Oates as authors whose major contribution consists in thematising 'otherness' as a fundamental experience of identity. Also they are interested in exploring the disabling limits of a culturally constructed femininity as well as the empowering potentials or subversive alternatives of grotesque female bodies and remodelled corporealities. As another common characteristic, their writing style reflects on the experience of becoming a Woman Writer in (pseudo)realist texts tinted with magic, science-fiction, or fantastic, gothic, or uncanny shades.

Moreover, Carter's specificity can be pinpointed in her considerable but often disregarded influence on contemporary continuations of the tradition of women's writing in English. Her grotesque themes, tones, leitmotifs and figures presented through a feminist perspective seem to re-emerge 'recycled' in the subversive works of authors acclaimed (and in the Foucauldian sense 'contained') by the current literary canon such as Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion* (1987) and *Sexing the Cherry* (1989), or Sarah Water's *Tipping the Velvet* (1998).[4]

As a novelist, Carter is distinguished by an uninhibited revelry in genres and styles. However, her early 'Bristol-trilogy' (consisting of *Shadow Dance* (1966), *Several Perceptions* (1968), and *Love* (1971), coined a trilogy not so much for their thematic relatedness as for their identical setting) that immediately earns her the unconditional acknowledgment of her critiques, is of a much more realistic style in comparison with what has later become her 'trade mark' magical writing. Gradually, she abandons this initial realistic style, which, anyway, has more to do with a sort of 'gothic realism,' the verity of nightmares than with a classic, 'pure realism.' Already at the time of writing her Bristol-trilogy, there emerges on one hand, the psychologisation of *The Magic Toyshop* (1967), that is a Freudian fable with an initiation plot and Oedipal allusions, sometimes strangely canonized as juvenile literature, and, on the other, the dystopian science-fiction of *Heroes and Villains* (1969). After the surrealist fantasy of *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* (1972), Carter seems to turn decisively to 'magical realism,' the approach that suits her "demythologising business" (Carter 1983, 71) the best, an approach that she remains faithful to throughout her final three novels, the actual material for the analysis in my thesis. *The Passion of New Eve* (1977), *Nights at the Circus* (1984) and *Wise Children* (1992) are published decades apart, and Carter keeps writing in the meantime, but never in the genre of novel. Thus, the re-enactment of the same technology of literary writing (feminist, magical realist, novelistic) and the re-

emergence of the same haunting theme (the social construction and the subversive re/deconstructions of femininity and otherness) support my assumption on the three novels' being a trilogy.

Undoubtedly, Carter's writings, especially her last three novels recall magical realism by containing magical elements narrated in a matter-of-fact tone as inherent parts of their realities, a fantastic '(il)logic' not questioned but accepted by the characters, plays of distorted, cyclical or deadened time, kaleidoscopic perspectives, a magical causality confusing cause and effect, mirrorings and open endings, as well as magical transgressions implying hibridity, excess and metamorphosis. Indeed, Carter seems to revel in all versions of magical realism as described by Lois-Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B Faris' (1995) and Maggie Ann Bowers' (2004) studies. She presents extraordinary events as ordinary, or ordinary events as extraordinary. She highlights the mysterious, miraculous wanders of everyday life, defamiliarizes the familiar and adds a magical dimension to the real by supplementation, excess, deviation. She performs re-vision by inviting to see with fresh eyes, from unbiased, child-like or alien perspectives. One of the major differences between magical realism and the fantastic, highlighted by Tamás Bényei, also characterizes Carter: her magical realism is a fundamentally postmodernist mode of writing in so far as it self-consciously relativizes hierarchies, challenges hegemonic systems, ordered spaces and subjectivities, and its magical acts are frequently rhetorical performances which produce metatexts constituting self-destabilising frames to the stories (Bényei 1997, 53-149).

Nevertheless, besides reflecting on these characteristics, in my analyses I concentrate upon further aspects of magical realism. Firstly, I examine how Carter's confidence trickster heroines play with the readerly hesitation regarded by Tzvetan Todorov as the fundamental feature of fantastic literature (Todorov 2002, 25). I reveal how the Carterian she-man, bird-woman and hag-seductress stage the relativity of (in)credibility and (dis)belief through (de)constructing self-fictionalizing narratives (I will call *autobiografictions*) in which they perform ambiguous identities which blur the dividing line between magical and real by simultaneously enacting marvel, freak and hoax.

Secondly, I analyse the political, ethical potentials of magical realism which make this narrative strategy so popular among womenwriters (like Isabel Allende, Fay Weldon or Carter), postcolonial authors (like Salman Rushdie or Arundathi Roy), and artists of ethnic minorities (like Native-American Leslie Marmon Silko, Afro-American Toni Morrison or Chinese-American Maxine Hong Kingston) or of non-hetero-sexual orientations (like lesbian writer Jeanette Winterson). I study how in Carter's feminist version of magical realism,

readers are invited to scrutinize the Foucauldian ideological technology of truth production that aims at reinforcing the prevailing hegemonic distribution of power. I show how 'key-signifiers' of 'self-homogenizing' repressive regimes are challenged, how alternative enabling identity positions, narratives, (his)stories are outlined and offered for the 'others,' who are no longer excluded but regarded as autonomous alterities, in a subversive text that renegotiates marginality and fosters cultural diversity.

Thirdly, I focus on the postmodern metafictional quality of magical realism surfacing in the forms of historiographic metafiction (Hutcheon 1988), self-reflexive narrative performance, and what I call *corporeagraphic metafiction*, all aiming to disclose and destabilize the social construction of history, fiction, identity and body. Already, corporeagraphic metafiction points towards my systematic concern with the Carterian body and text, since it intertwines a critique of the ideological inscription on the paradoxically abjectified-mystified feminised body, and a critique of the canon formations marginalizing the engendered corpus of women's literature, while it traces alternative transcripts of non-normative femininities, and illuminates palimpsestic potentials through which cultural embodiments may be dis/re-embodied in grotesque ways, and monologic prescriptions may be re- and rewritten via corporeally motivated, polyphonic, open texts generated by the fantastic-freakish heroines.

Last but not least, the innovative quality of my study consists in my concentrating upon the magically metamorphic grotesque *body*'s effect on the hybrid *style* of its representation in order to bring to full realisation my analysis of the Carterian body and text, to which I shall refer to due to their striking interrelatedness as *body-text*, while attempting to unmask and interface *the text of the body* and *the body of the text*. I perform what Peter Brooks calls a study of the *somatization of the text* and of the *semioticization of the body* with the aim to reveal how the uncontrollable corporeality of the grotesque surfaces in textual slips, narrative gaps and overflows, in poetic figures, tropes and rhetorical strategies. I show how the corporeal and textual performances fuse to turn the narration itself into play, seduction, trick, or magic, so as to match the grotesque body. I reveal how in *PNE* the ineradicably male, hyper-feminised, transsexual Eve/lyn's reminiscences' oscillation between the excessive re-enactment of the stereotypically engendered registers of a sentimental, loquacious, feminine and a barren, minimalist, masculine discourse imitates her devouring and disgorging body, and recalls how ideology cannibalistically incorporates and regurgitates corporeality. I examine how in *NC* the winged giantess circus-aerialiste Fevvers' 'overwriting' and her narrative's revelry in poetic images models itself upon her body convulsed by a laughing fit. I

analyse how *WC*'s twinned septuagenarian hag-seductress Dora and Nora Chance's flirtatious, fibbing, forgetful text full of 'reader teasers' mimes their winking, swinging, coquette body. I explore how the heroines' narrative style respectively embody the eating and discharging body, the laughing body, or the sexualized female body. I reveal how the canonical Name of the Author is ironically replaced by the pathologised female body traditionally regarded incompatible with an autonomous subject's agency, as the authoress-heroines mockingly autograph their texts with this mark of their self-fashioned, embodied, woman-writerly identity: with the frenetically laughing Fevvers' hysteric or infantile body, the devouring-disgorging Eve/lyn's bulimic body or the seductress Dora Chance's nymphomaniac body. I concentrate on the fantastic heroines, who embody various (abject, sublime, burlesque, simulacrous) aspects of the grotesque blurring borders of magic and real. Thus, my primary aim is to focus on such, rarely examined magical realist features as the richness of sensory details, the lively simulated orality, the embodied voice, the proliferation of figurativity, the self-enhancing magical imagery, and the literalized metaphors, which all call to life the grotesque female corporeality functioning as the very narrative engine of the Carterian text.

Carter positions herself clearly on the side of the European "scholarly" type of magical realism that constructs a magical, speculative universe as a political, narrative strategy versus the Latin-American "mythic, folkloric type" of magical realism that is inspired by the colourful *mestizaje* cultural heritage, the historical, geographical, demographical and political diversity of Latin-America. (Bowers 2004, 32-65) Her magical realism is the European "epistemological version in which the marvels stem from the observer's vision," versus the "ontological version in which America itself in considered to be marvellous" (Weisberger and Echevarria in Faris 1995, 165). Preventing her comparison with Gabriel Garcia Marquez, who is considered to be the founding father of magical realism, Carter argues that the social forces which produced her were very different from the Latin-American cultural heritage producing Marquez. (Carter in Haffenden 1985, 81) She suggests that the oral quality of her text is an homage to or an inheritance from her maternal grandmother[5], an ingenious storyteller who brought her up in Yorkshire during the war years (—and who, a working class suffragist and a radical, described as "a woman of such physical and spiritual heaviness she might have been born with a greater degree of gravity than most people" (Carter 1998b, 6), clearly resembles *NC*'sheroine, the aerial giantess, Fevvers). Moreover, Carter constantly claims that her fictions re-imagine European fairy-tales (Perrault and the Grimm brothers) and Greco-Latin mythology. At the same time, ironically proclaiming herself to be "the pure product of an

advanced, industrialized, post-imperialist country in decline" (Carter 1983, 73), she positions herself in a historically specific location, one that explicitly puts her on the late-modernist social map of Europe.

As for her preference to be called "magical mannerist" (Carter in Haffenden 1985, 79) instead of magical realist, is of importance for me not that much for what she refuses as for what she maintains of the label in order to underscore the texturedness of her writing. The trademark Carterian 'over-writing' is indeed mannerist in the general sense of the term used to describe any stylistic habit that is carried to excess, seems exaggerated or eccentric. Yet, her writing is also *mannerist* in the art historical sense of the term (originally referring to 16th century Italian art between the High Renaissance and the Baroque) in so far as as it achieves a disturbing effect by distorted figures, unexpected, violent perspectives, strangely disrupted harmonies, spectacularly staged, complex compositions, almost tangibly physical corporealities, and a revelry in representations of the surprising, the emblematic, the grotesque, enhanced by an intricate formulaic, theatrical, over-stylized (a (mock) mannered) quality. In 19th century Swiss art critic Heinrich Wölfflin's view, mannerism was a part of the baroque esthetic apparent in the 17th century, and surfacing in succeeding epochs and movements. Accordingly, it is not surprising that Carter's writing is also often labelled by critiques as baroque (Jordan 1994, 190, Barker 2004, 14). Her text bears all the principal baroque attributes enumerated by Wölfflin, such as disproportion, incompletion, proliferation, boundlessness, movement, obfuscation, and colossal 'gargantuanism' (Wölfflin 1950, 1-17)[6]—traits I shall unveil in Carter's style, narrative-structure and themes alike, just as much as the trademark Carterian feminist grotesque bodies.

Furthermore, Carter's refusal of the label 'magical *realist*' exposes her willingness to reject all claims at a trustworthy realism or authentic historicity, while as a corollary to this disclaimer, she also underscores her tendency to *unmake* truths instead of asserting them. Despite the political self-consciousness of her journalism (writing fighting against sexism, classism, racism, capitalism, consumerism, hegemonic patriarchy, colonisation, and nuclear warfare (Carter 1998b)), and despite the fact that her novels contain recurring implicit references to her sympathies for the working class, to her leftist views, her pacifism, and most obviously to her feminism, (and despite the fact that some ctitics accuse her of a maniac political correctness (see Bayley in Jordan 1994, 191)[7]), in my view, the political facet of her fictional writing remains self-consciously 'restricted' by the *magic* of her mode of writing.

In other words—even if in the present study I propose to underline the feminist potentials of the Carterian fiction—I wish to stress that the complexity of her texts repudiates

simplifying and simplistic program reading which would merely seek literary illustrations of political tenets. Her fictional world is more of fantasies than of politics. (In fact, radical feminist critiques of her works go as far as to reproach her feminism's insufficiency, claiming that this 'shortcoming' is due to her falling into "the infernal trap inherent in the fairy tale [...], the carrier of [patriarchal] ideology", and that of the "rigidly sexist psychology of the erotic" (Duncker 1986, 227).) Her characters, the ex-whore, midget, socialist, anarchist, feminist, Lizzie, Fevvers' step-mother in *NC,* or the senile arch-seductress, pacifist, vegetarian, nudist Grandma Chance, the Chance sisters' surrogate mother in *WC* are primarily illuminating grotesque figures, not activists. In Carter's fiction, her politics are always accompanied by a mocking self-irony, oft acquired by a grotesque overwriting. As a result, for example, Lizzie is an "inconvenient harlot" because of

> her habit of lecturing the clients on the white slave trade, the rights and wrongs of women, universal suffrage, as well as the Irish question, the Indian question, republicanism, anti-clericism, syndicalism and the abolition of the House of Lords. With all of which Nelson [the Madame of the brothel] was in full sympathy but, as she said, the world won't change overnight and we must eat (Carter 1994, 292)

Carter's cruel depiction of the self-mutilating, ruthlessly terrorist militant feminist's claustrophobic, totalitarian or anarchist communities in *PNE* demonstrates that Carter is not only subversive, but also sceptical to the core. She calls herself "a child of the nuclear age[...]a child of irony and the absurd, of black humour, of guilt and anger" (Carter 1998b, 44). Her fiction refuses all '-isms,' realism and ideologism among them.[8]

Carter's final trilogy to be analysed in my study can be considered as a *historiographic metafiction* only in so far as it is characterized by a "theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs" (Hutcheon 1988, 5). Instead of 'patriarchal *his*tory,' a linear, positivist historiography marked by a focus on rational explanations, teleological motivations, on 'significant' events and 'great men,' the Carterian Narrator-Heroine of the last three novels produces her-stories, by recalling her subjective experience of the *Zeitgeist* of a historical era impregnating her self-fictionalising autobiographical narrative, emphasising the insignificant happenings, the minor, marginalized characters, women's silenced stories, left out from history. (In *NC*, the winged circus-star, Fevvers undertakes to interweave into her interview the stories of all the female freaks surrounding her, "the histories of those woman who would otherwise go down nameless and forgotten, erased from history as if they had never been" (Carter 1994, 285), while in *WC*, Dora Chance pens down with(in) her memoirs a whole family saga, a fashion chronicle, a history of popular entertainment industry and a manual to

the art of seduction, while, paradoxically, *PNE*'s ahistorical, dystopian setting portrays perfectly of the atmosphere of the post 1960's US.)

What the novelist Carter really does excel in is an *identity politics* that I shall refer to and elaborate on in the followings as a *freak ethics*, due to its being motivated by the central figure of the Carterian mythology, the *freak*. The trilogy to be analysed illustrates the evolution of the concepts of 'femininity' and 'otherness' in Carter's oeuvre characterised by the increasingly enabled (feminist) aspect of the grotesque heroines, who gradually move from the pathological self-decomposition of the forcedly transgendered hyperfeminine macho in *PNE*, to the spectacular empowerment and confidence trickster performance of the self-stylised birdwomanly giantess-aerialiste in *NC*, up to the ethically-invested caring solidarity of the twinned septaguanerian seductress showgirls in *WC*. The Carterian heroines' confusing corporealities endowed with subversive capacities certainly evoke the Mikhail Bakhtin's carnivalesque grotesque, in particular its feminist reevaluation by Mary Russo's female grotesque. Yet, the Carterian weird women also radically challenge these theories on the grotesque through spectacularly and self-ironically overplaying their own ambiguous (inherent *and* (re)invented, ideologically limiting *and* alternatively empowering) femini*sed* grotesque quality, and provokingly proclaiming themselves as feminist grotesque freaks, with the aim to perform corporeal-, narrative- *self-freakings*. The term *freak* is particularly useful for describing Carter's feminist grotesque heroines and ethics since it does not evoke the communal celebration associated with the Bakhtinian carnivalesque grotesque, but, on the contrary, recalls the forever marginalized, temptingly-threateningly different, *par excellence* otherness. Yet, the concept of the *freak* also underlines that difference is *culturally constructed* as abnormal and ob-scene, since the original freak-show curiosities—like the bearded lady or the hyper-elastic snake-man—are not handicapped with biological disabilities but are enabled with alternative anatomies. Accordingly, the 'other(ed)' is revealed as a historically changing category arbitrarily (dis)identified with different differring marginalized minorities rejected, 'freaked' by our hegemonic, normative societies. Nevertheless, Carterian heroines seem to agree with Robert Bogdan, as for them freak is not only a physiological condition, but "the performance of a stylized presentation" which functions as a site of contradiction, challenging notions of stable identity and pointing to cultural dissonance (Bogdan 1988, 3, Peterson 1996, 294).

The *freak ethics* in Carter is built on an ethics of care propagated by feminist theoreticians as Carol Gilligan (1986), Julia Kristeva (1987) or Donna Haraway (1996). Instead of a self-identity based on a "sacrificial logics" (Weir 1996, 14-42, Kristeva 1992,

199), on the marginalisation and domination of troublingly uncategorisable, differing elements labelled as 'other(ed)' 'not-me's as opposed to which a normal and normative identity can be (per)formed, *freak ethics* embraces 'otherness,' 'the internal freak' as an inherent part of the self. *Freak ethics* challenges the Derridean Western (phallo)logocentric logic of the violently hierarchical binary oppositions (mind-body, identity-nonidentity, subject-object, presence-absence, male-female). It resists this "system of pejoration" which identifies difference with "that which is *other-than* the accepted norm" (Braidotti 1994, 78), which valorizes one term through the denial or repression of its dependence on the marginalized other (see Weir 1996, 25). *Freak ethics* reveals and questions the association of 'otherness' with abnormality, inferiority, abjection, anomalousness, monstrosity, often analogous to femininity, especially female corporeality. It resists what Luce Irigaray calls the phallocentric dialectics' logic of *hommosexuality* that marginalizes negativized *difference* by adulating the *same* it artificially (re)produces (through the Freudian sexual indifference that presupposes only *one* masculine sex's phallic or castrated versions underlying the truth of any science and the logic of every discourse (Irigaray 1993, 118)). Primarily, *freak ethics*—surfacing in the Carterian heroines' self-freaking bodies, texts and identities—undertake to trace an alternative, non-normative, non-othering, non-devaluating, non-dualistic concept of 'otherness' (of femininity, and of corporeality) conceived not on the basis of difference and domination, but as integral part of the self. From this perspective, Carter's final novel trilogy's historical referentiality or significance consists in providing fictionalized illustrations of the history of Western (patriarchal, capitalist, colonising, hegemonic) evaluations of difference, of the changing social conceptions of the 'other(ed)' who becomes embodied by different marginalized minorities, but is consequently associated with the symbolical 'not-me,' 'the Other' dis-identified as the grotesque freak.

PNE, narrating the story of Eve/lyn, a misogynist macho surgically transformed by vengeful militant feminists into a perfect woman, emblematizes the paradoxical and problematic aspects of the process how feminism had to "carve out its own identity from the unisex mould" of 1960s radical politics and counterculture movements (Sage 1994a, 35)", and how the sixties' human rights movements in general *uncompromisingly* took 'difference' as a *symbol* of the *fight* for equality, and thus, kept the idealized, homogenized, essentialized, disembodied 'other' within the frames of the violent hierarchy of binary oppositions. Therefore, via a reversed logic, the 'different' became primarily a super-signifier transcending above the 'same,' as a propaganda slogan of the universal struggle for the abolition of difference.[9] Furthermore, the grotesque body-text illustrates that "if within patriarchal culture,

the female 'other' represents a repressed version of the patriarchal self, then within feminist culture, the 'other' woman is the lesbian, the prostitute, the hag, and the fury," those freakish dimensions of femininity that the 1960s' and 70s' politics of equality repressed so as to validate the Feminine experience and expression (Peterson 1996, 293). (The novel also demonstrates how Carter—after a revelatory journey to Japan and her illuminating feminist self-recognition—discovered her woman-writerly self *in-between* "male impersonation" (Carter 1983, 70) and radical feminism, in ironic metafictions, which challenge hierarchical dichotomies, recycle patriarchal myths of femininity, and start out from freak corporealities.)

NC is set in 1900, at the turn of the century, when the New Woman, a feminist icon emerges in Europe and North America to challenge gender norms, to refuse constraints imposed by Victorian norms of femininity, the cult of domesticity and patriarchal domination, and to vindicate greater freedom to pursue public roles, self-realisation, to gain financial independence, proper education, and the right to women's bodily and sexual autonomy[10]. Although the New Woman was advocated by 'progressive' intellectuals and suffragettes,[11] but this 'freak,' who paradoxically reclaims male privileges and 'flaunts her feminine sex appeal,' in 19th century anti-feminist journalist Eliza Lynn Linton's words, "the girl of the period," "this creature, who dyes her hair and paints her face,[...]and whose sole idea of life is fun," provokes a general outrage on the part of conservative society, and soon becomes associated with "monstrosity," "savageness" and "maniac" "madness" (Linton 1868, 2, 4, 11). Fevvers, the winged giantess *aerialiste* freak can be regarded as an excessive embodiment of the "free woman [who] in an unfree society will be a monster" (Carter 1978, 129), of the woman who will be identified with grotesque corporeality if she accepts her culturally prescribed gender (her gender 'carved onto' her body via an ideological process I shall refer to with Teresa De Lauretis' term as *engendering* (De Lauretis 1987)) and identified with abnormal monstrosity if she refuses it (Smith 1993, 15-16).

In *WC*, the twinned seductress Dora Chance's life-story spans from around 1915, her date of birth (coquettishly left unclear) up to the early 1990s, her 75th birthday that she commemorates by writing her reminiscences. Dance-hall-girl Dora primarily views this dark century from a comic, ironic perspective granted by her profession (her motto being: "nothing is a matter of life and death, except life and death" (Carter 1991, 215)), but the personal tragedies marking her life also reflect the cataclysms marking the history of the century. Dora's biological mother, the orphan Pretty Kitty dies during the First World War in child-bed, while Dora's foster-mother Grandma Chance is bombed in the Second World War on her way to a pub. The eerily grotesque repeated loss of 'loose' mothers (unmarried women

inventing families) recalls the insanely systematic annihilation of 'other(ed)s,' reminding of the dehumanizing, alienating, unspeakable grotesquerie of the 20th century when any human beings labelled as other freaks were deported, secluded and destroyed in masses via elaborate technologies, with scientific preciseness, in the name of ideology, for the sake of 'purifying' civilisation. Defying militarism along with patriarchy and religion, Dora, like Grandma Chance, "shakes her fist at the old men in the sky" who, in a reversed Oedipal scenario, and a compulsive cyclicality of history, kill of the young [and the women] they envy and fear (Carter 1991, 29).

On the whole, the significance of the freak body and of my analysis of the Carterian freak resides in three factors. Firstly, it helps us in understanding the contemporary material body as a site of power struggles with a particular relevance for women who experience the disciplinings of their bodies on a daily basis. Secondly, it facilitates the interpretation of contemporary feminist art obsessed with alternative evaluations of 'otherness', metamorphosis, heterogeneity and the impossibility of autobiography—the cardinal issues of Carter's fiction. Thirdly, it enables our recognition of the history of Western construction of difference governed by a logic of binary oppositions, and domination-based self-construction, while it outlines an alternative body- and identity-politics starting out on the side of the freak.

The dates of Carter's last three novels' publication coincides with the gradual incursion of the discipline of *cultural studies* characterized by multifarious concerns as canon-revision, ideology-criticism, subcultural dynamics, working class experience, issues of race, class and gender, the study of meanings and practices of 'everyday life' and 'low' cultural phenomena in (post)industrialist societies via heterogeneous interpretive strategies borrowed from sociology, cultural anthropology, literary theory, film studies, art history, occasionally psychoanalysis and philosophy. (see During 1997) Carter, despite her initial "dislike [for] the prevailing critical fashion for 'relevance' and 'social content'" (Barker 2004, 2) [12], becomes increasingly interested in these issues, to the point that, in my view, she is likely to have invented her last three, constantly self-spectacularising, grotesque heroines (the couple of the transvestite movie-star and the surgically feminized man, the winged giantess aerialiste, the septuagenarian seductress twinned dance-hall-girls) with the aim to assign to them the role of the cultural critique, despite their featuring in 'magical realist' scenarios. The heroines self-consciously stage their freaked selves in order to encourage women's recognition of their mis-recognition in the socially prefabricated, restrained feminine identities. Furthermore, they mock contemporary western society's aim to discipline, contain and repress 'otherness' by making it hyper-visible, thus, spectacularising, commodifying, and neutralising 'difference'

by putting it on public display, safely within the limits of the dominant culture. They criticize the willingness to exercise control by the Foucauldian ideological technology of *panopticism*, encouraging all 'docile subjects' for the interiorisation of the normalising and othering gaze of power (Foucault 1980, 146-166).

On the other hand, Carter's novels to be analysed are forerunners of the 1990s fashionable academic trend of *body studies*, preoccupied with the cultural constitution, the ideological manipulation, the pathological self-deformations and the subversive re-stylisations of the engendered social subject's corporeality. Furthermore, the last novels' showy 'body-artists' also foreshadow those hybrid figures of the 1990s feminist theory, which propose to provoke subversions of social- and representational systems, and meaning- and identity-patterns by starting out from their grotesque corporealities, their spectacular bodily performances. Judith Butler's gender-bending, parodic-political transvestite performer (1990), Donna Haraway's trickster-coyote-cyborg (1991), Rosi Braidotti's nomadic subject (1994), Gloria Anzaldúa's bordercrossing, mestiza Serpent Goddess Coatlicue (1987), just like Hélène Cixous' much earlier laughing Medusa (1975) are all sisters of the Carterian feminist grotesque heroines (and perhaps even of Carter herself who, in Lorna Sage's words, "was a wolf in Granny's clothing to the end" (Sage 1999, 3)).

In my opinion, "popular necrophilia" (Warner in Barker 2004, 14) is not the only reason why Carter became canonized only posthumously, and gained central positioning in Contemporary British Literature only later in the 1980s and 1990s. The aforementioned feminist theories of subversive re-embodiment and the feminist rediscovery of the Bakhtinian theory of the grotesque (by Mary Russo, Dale Bauer and Heather L. Johnson among others) (upon which I shall rely on in the followings) significantly contributed to the revaluation and appreciation of the Carterian text that provided prophetic fictional illustrations of these emerging theories (—while Carter's magical inventiveness, imagination, and (self)ironic humour safeguarded her fiction from becoming reduced to political manifestos.)

The slow crystallisation of the Carterian oeuvre's canonisation was probably due to Carter's preference for combining diverse literary genres and styles, thus, making her work 'difficult to place.' Carter committed herself fully to the challenging of the patriarchal canon's gendered hierarchisation of genres by demythologising, popularising and 'feminising' conventionally 'high,' 'masculinized' genres such as the (auto)biography, the historical novel or the picaresque, and reformulating in elite form and sophisticated intellectual 'high-style' popular genres such as the fairy tale, the 'oral tradition' of folktales, nursery rhymes,

vaudeville jokes and her Grandma's storytelling[13], as well as horror fiction, pornography and early Hollywood cinema.

I believe Carter also found pleasure in reworking women's literary tradition, in inviting what I call *bifocal reading* (that I elaborate on in the followings) by ironically reappropriating stereotypical authorial positionings of the 'silly lady novelist' and of the 'madwomanwriter.' She enjoyed excessively over-writing *clichés* of feminine discourses in kitsch, gossipy or histrionic modes, and thus, both nostalgically recalling and internally subverting the *female* Gothic of Ann Radcliff, the *female Bildungsroman* of Jane Austen or the Brontë sisters, or the *female* stream-of-consciousness of Virginia Woolf, or women's popular romance nowadays called 'chick-lit,' designed for a 'lesser,' laic or militant female audience.

I find it all the more important to focus on Carter's 'recycling' of the '*feminine*' literary tradition of *women's* literature, since her canonisation rewarding her with the academically acclaimed status of 'high' author was accompanied by her work's 'masculinization' by critiques coining her "our Lady Edgar Allan Poe" (Brockway in Sage 1999, 4), "the high priestess of Sadeian postgraduate porn," "the Salvador Dali of English letters" (in Barker 2004, 3). She has been associated with Swift, Rabelais, Bakhtin, Marquez, Borges, Hoffman, Wilde, Lewis Carroll, or Bulgakov (whom she indubitably does revive in her writings), virtually all the players of the 'grotesque-oriented' fantastic, gothic or magical realist literary scene—but for the womenwriters of these or other literary traditions, who are utterly neglected as potentials sources of inspiration for her work. Nevertheless, in my view, the late Carterian fiction's feminist grotesque heroine recalls former female-authored freaks as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, or Stevie Smith's nonsense poems' 'doodle-heroines' (with the difference that the Carterian freaks are mostly female, working-class, and fleshly material). Carter re-stages classic figures of seduction and of feminist empowerment, as De Sade's Juliette, or charismatic female move icons ranging from the silent film 'flapper'[14] Louise Brooks, to lethal *femmes fatales* like Marlene Dietrich, Greta Garbo, Rita Hayworth or Mae West, and to "angel-face-on-the-run," "blonde clown" Marilyn Monroe (Carter 1978, 37, 68). (All of them attest Carter's mythomania and by their strong visual presence reinforce the cinematographic quality of the text).

Moreover, she re-enacts performances of femininity to the extreme by over-identifying with a hybrid patchwork, an intertextual collage of western representations of womanliness. Readers shall become addicts or adversaries of Carter's fiction depending on their relationship to this trademark Carterian revelry in intertextual allusions, in which *PNE*'s transvestite Tristessa personifies Juliette, Dido, Scarlett O'Hara, Cathy Earnshaw, Madame Bovary,

Madeline Usher, Dietrich and Garbo among others, while *NC*'s winged *aerialiste* Fevvers is introduced as Toulouse-Lautrec's idol, Colette's friend, Freud's muse, Charcot's monstrous hysteric, Winged Victory, Helen of Troy, Leda with the Swan, and Angel of Death, whereas in *WC* the Ibsenian doll's house tragic heroine Nora and the Freudian hysteric patient Dora become mirror-images to each other.

The ambiguity of the Carterian text surfaces on multiple levels. Her (over-)writing's intellectual intertextual density does not prevent her from keeping a unique, playful and popular voice of her own. Her revisions complement patriarchal myths with feminist empowerment. Her feminism is both self-ironically destabilized and self-consciously reinforced by her magical fantasy. She regards history as a human construct, as a cultural production of ideologically-infiltrated mythic master-narratives she undertakes to *demythologize*, yet she dwells in a *mythomania* obsessed with feminist or countercultural icons of her era. She believes in writing being "an act that takes you out of your own skin, out of your background, gender, class, nationality" (Sage 1994a, 2), and repeatedly reasserts the importance of historical locatedness, culturally situated knowledges and subjectivities, as well as the need for critical self-reflection and caring, ethical responsibility. These are antagonisms which are acted out upon the Carterian fiction's grotesque body, text and identity, constituting the primal object of investigation of my study.

My next, theoretical chapter is followed by three close-reading textual analyses. First, I interpret the *PNE* as a paradoxical, painful yet revelatory text, arguing that the surgically sex-changed, socially conditioned Eve/lyn's forced feminized embodiment coincides with the violated body's being stretched over, even 'crucified' throughout the narrative. A feminist geographical reading discovers at the depth of the self-decomposing text the female body's dismembered parts and fetishized fragments (as the devouring *vagina dentata*, the sterile womb, the wound(ed breast), the crying eyes, and the regurgitating mouth) which become emblematic stations of the hero/ine's picaresque journey, during his/her passion of 'becoming (monstrous) woman.' In my view, this topography of pain not only maps out a ruthless parody of patriarchal myths of femininity, but also embodies the feminized subject's cultural dis-ease. While the pathological manifestations of the anxieties related to engendering, the psychosomatic symptoms of *female body dysmorphia*—a misconceived image of the self resulting in violent corporeal mutilations performed on oneself—are thematized on an explicit and implicit level. Even more interestingly, they shockingly infect the novel's language via self-destructive and mutually abortive-castrative, contradictory and fatally embracing,

antagonistically engendered narrative voices, (con)fusing a male impersonator's, an ironic feminist's, a post-operative transsexual's and a bulimic patient's voices.

My close-reading of *NC* presents how the unlimited excess, the irregular protuberances and the unusual ambiguity of the 'unreadable' grotesque body mark the text by the recurring poetic figures and tropes over-accumulating hyperboles, pleonasms, catachresises and extended metaphors among others, and how this verbose revelry distinguishes the Carterian body-text as exorbitant, unstable, heterogeneous, self-contradictory and hilarious, matching the Bakhtinian *carnivalesque grotesque body.* I differentiate between the novel's various laughing bodies with the aim to disclose them as textual themes, stylistic inspirators and narrative engines. I examine how the winged woman's carnivalesque merriment that fuses the laughter of Medusa familiar from Cixous' feminist manifesto with the mockery of the Monroesque, self-ironic 'blonde clown' is complemented and destabilized by the clowns' compensatory, 'scapegoating' laughter that echoes the fear and frustration of the Freudian tendentious wit and uncanny experience. I explore how the textual pleasure is brought to full realization by the infantile frenzy of laughter, children's *joie de vivre*, aroused by the childish plays and toys (as the jack-in-the-box, the snow-ball, the pick-a-boo, or the tickling game), which (un)structure the narrative and contribute to the very dynamics of the Carterian text. The laughing bodies produce a laughing text via somatized complex sentences in which we find encoded a laughing person's rhythmic deep breathing, as an over-written, periodic style invites readers to enjoy the oral quality of Carter's text, to read it out loud, to model physiologically the functioning of the laughing body by embodying its very vibration.

Finally, in *WC*, I examine how Dora, a septuagenarian sibling from the legendarily enchanting Chance sisters, flirts with signs of femininity, conventional representational strategies and the symbolic universe itself, by simultaneously 'making-up' her face, her femininity, her identity and her (pseudo)autobiographical text alike in a 'game of signs.' I reveal how, precisely via turning her overplayed version of the obligatory feminine cosmetic decoration of the body into a 'counter-spectacularity,' a subversive strategy that fuels her narrative of the self, she incarnates the ultimate (simulacrum)seductress, the hilarious *femme vitale*, who succeeds in seducing even the key-signifiers of the symbolic system, like Truth, the Phallus/the Phallic Gaze or Death itself. Dora's parodically exaggerated self-stylization simultaneously enacts a challenge to feminine invisibility, a grotesque yet empowering self-spectacularization, and a Baudrillardian "aesthetics of disappearance." The construction of her patchwork body, her feminist-freakish-feminine self matches her ironically hyper-femininised, hybrid narrative (de)composed of gossip, tall-tales, dirty jokes and delusions.

Her flirtatious, fibbing, forgetful narrative full of 'reader-teasers' virtually enacts all the moves of the seductress' body-language, her winking glance, swinging walk and coquetterie. Along with her *trompe l'oeil* body, Dora realizes a *trompe l'oeil* identity and text, as her (dis)appearing body fosters her autobiographical defacement in a self-masking narrative, where both body and text are made to signify with signs denuded of their meaning, the resemblance to Woman/Truth surfaces to vanish, as the logic of re-production/re-presentation is replaced by the logic of seduction. Moreover, via a genuine, feminist gesture, seduction emerges as a source of a feminist epistemology, a feminist ethics of care, a performative, self-freaking, communal identity, and an engine for an alternative female authorship.

In the following chapter I will try to clarify at the outset the most vital theoretical and critical assumptions upon which my reading of Angela Carter's fictional grotesqueries will be based, with the aim to facilitate the comprehension of my succeeding textual analyses.

II. Theoretical Background for Body-Texts

1. The *Semioticization* of the Body and the *Somatization* of the Text in Carter

The majority of Carter's critics—writing in most of the cases from an overtly feminist perspective—focus on her grotesque characters in order to analyse the gender-politics embedded in Carter's fiction. Numerous studies deal with her playful demythologisations of socially constituted myths of femininity, the limits or potentials of the gender-bender performances, the bodily transformations, and the transitory states of her subjects, the politically incorrect or correct, the pornographic or sexually liberating nature of her fiction. Recent publications include narratological approaches, readings labelling her work as postmodern, carnivalesque, magical realist, or feminist metafictional. However, what I completely miss from the canonized body of Carter-criticism (including collections of critical essays edited by Lorna Sage, Lindsey Tucker, Joseph Bristow and Trev-Lynn Broughton, Lorna Sage's, Sarah Gamble's, Alison Lee's, Linden Peach's and Aidan Day's monographs, and numerous separately published essays and reviews) is an analysis of the *meaning-in-process* concomitant with the *subject-in-process*, in Julia Kristeva's sense of the terms (*sujet/sens en procès*) (Kristeva 1985a, 216), that is a stylistic, rhetorical study of the subversive, dynamic text of Carter, with a particular attention paid to the disciplined yet transgressive, heterogeneous body (de)constructed in her destabilizing discourse, and with a special focus directed onto the narratively re-invented, en-gendered yet re-embodied identity category, the Carterian fiction's bodies and discourses generate.

Critics often highlight the "pungency and power" of Carter's language (Sage 1994b, 1), her "sensuous, opulent, even decadent style" (Bristow-Broughton 1997, 6), her "highflying rhetoric" (Russo 1995, 178), her intense, lyrical, sensible, private soliloquies (Armstrong 1994, 277), her "banal and extraordinary, prim and offensive, baroque and offhand" writing, her "sharp, luxuriant skill" (Jordan 1994, 190), her "imaginative, uncommon," "lush and extravagant prose" (Sage 1999, 1), praising her style in a brief, complementary compliment, or sometimes make a passing critical remark on her too "ornate, bejewelled, artificial, higly wrought prose" (Warner 1994, 248), and "overdone rhetoric" (Gamble 1997, 285). Yet, they all fail to provide a thorough in-depth analysis of Carter's language use. Even the Carter-expert Lorna Sage satisfies with filling the empty gap of a missing stylistic analysis with the shallow remark: "You can make it [Carter's text] sound like *écriture féminine* only if you don't quote much" (Sage 1994b, 20). As for Carter, she keeps stressing in her characteristic, enthusiastic style her pleasure in subversive language use,[15] while she insists that "writing fiction as women" belongs to the realm of applied linguistics, as it signifies a "slow process of decolonialising our language and our basic habits of thought[...]a creation of a means of expression for an infinitely greater variety of experience than has been possible heretofore, to say things for which no language previously existed" (Carter 1983, 75).

Therefore, the aim of my study is to fill the gap of the close-reading stylistic analysis missing from the Carter reception through scrutinizing the *relationships of text, body and identity* in the Carterian oeuvre. I examine in a remarkable trilogy the interconnections of the embodied voice and the narrativized corporeality, the textual- and corporeal performances of the masquerading languages and the grotesque bodies, *the text of the body* and *the body of the text*, with the hope to share the pleasures of the neglected feminist grotesque *body-text*.

The starting point of my analysis shall be Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's idea: "There is no difference between what a book says and the manner how it does it." "[I] will never ask what a book means [wants to say], whether it is a signified or a signifier, will not seek to understand anything in a book [in the sense of wishing to pin down a final meaning closing the text,] but rather ask [myself] how it functions," how it generates its intensities, relating to/against "which multiplicities it introduces and metamorphoses its own [multiplicities], with which other-bodies-without organs it converges" (Deleuze-Guattari 1980, 10, *my translation*)[16]. Accordingly, with Deleuze and Guattari, I regard disparate texts of an oeuvre as an intertextual unity fused by the literature-machine, I neglect established hierarchies to focus on the immediate relationship between the thematic content and the style of a literary work of art, and use the metaphor of the body to identify the literary text. I

interpret Carter's three novels as open texts in constant dialogue with each other and with the larger corpus, which problematize from different perspectives and in various voices the same spectacularized, feminized, metamorphosing, self-freaking body—the very engine of the text—whose narrativization allows for the (re)construction of an enabling, self-fashioning, relational, re-embodied female identity, authorship, and a long-term feminist empowerment.

In other words, I perform a reading that could be called—elaborating on Peter Brooks' terms—a complex analysis of the *semioticization of the body narrated in the text* complemented by the subversive *somatization of the text on the body.* By this, Brooks means, as he explains in his *Body Work. Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative,* that the modern narrative, driven by a *scopophiliac, epistemophilic urge,* a desire to see and know the body, strives to bring the body into language and to write stories on the body, since artists find in "the body a source and locus of meanings[, the motor force of storytelling, and believe] that stories cannot be told without making the body a prime vehicle of narrative significations" (Brooks 1993, xii).

Although I find Brooks' study an excellent, most thought-provoking book, I use his concepts, the *semioticization of the body* and the *somatization of the text* in a slightly different sense. The reasons of my reconsideration are the following. Firstly, while Brooks concentrates on modern narrative, Carter's fiction, despite its modernist characteristics, bears, in my view, significant postmodernist features. Secondly, while Brooks examines mainly texts on/from the phallic male gaze's perspective, the Carterian texts' implied authors are heroines who (de)compose their own self-fictionalizing narratives (I call *autobiografictions*) from ironically hyperfeminine, feminist or transgender viewpoints. Thirdly, the modern narrative's semioticization of the body, as Brooks underlines, "is intent on uncovering the body in order to expose a truth that must be written in the flesh" (Brooks 1993, i), whereas Carter's unreliable narrator-heroines uncover their bodies merely to expose, in a postmodern manner, that there is no such thing as an ultimate truth, a static body or a fixed identity. Finally, I wish to go beyond the Brooksian monomaniac concern with the desired, desiring body, by examining how the Carterian bodies both enact and subvert their engendering, how they appear to disappear and reappear, performing differing, showy, confidence-trickster personas, which mock the objectifying epistemophilic gaze, and initiate the empowering visibility of the self-stylized, metamorphosing, spectacularly re-embodied subject.

My interpretation of the Carterian novel's *semioticization of the body* focuses on the ideologically disciplined body, more specifically the engendered body, a discursively controlled, socially contained entity, governed by its 'fossilized' representations, naturalized

cultural myths, and physiological prescriptions dictated by patriarchal hegemony's political-, financial-interests, as recently mass-communicated normative ideals of beauty industries. The body is interpreted as a site of struggles and negotiations over the shape of power, "a politically inscribed entity, its physiology and morphology shaped by [patriarchal] histories and practices of containment and control—from foot-binding and corseting to rape and battering to compulsory heterosexuality, forced sterilization, unwanted pregnancy and [...] explicit commodification" (Bordo 1993, 21-22). Yet, I reveal that this 'docile body' is nevertheless capable of *subverting from within* its mandatory narrative due to its heterogeneous, 'trans-linguistic' corporeality manifested in various freakish forms (the abject, the sublime, the fantastic), which contribute to the *somatization of the text*, the emergence of a troubling other text, a *body-text* generated by the represented bodies which 'come to a life of their own' to destabilize representation by the ecstatic resurrection of their 'unspeakable,' compulsively reformulated corporeality at the heart of textuality. Carter's fiction circumscribes the body as a paradoxical space that fuses the ideologically prescribed, normalizing *writing on the body* with the subversive, materially induced *(re)writing from the body*. The repertoire of the self-(de)composing heroines' identity-performances and narratives include conventionally feminine, ironically hyper-femininised, freaked female, resisting feminist, masculine-female and feminine-male transvestite, or androgynously transgendered roles and voices, so that their variedly en-/trans-gendered bodies sustain the ventriloquy of the Carterian text. I interpret the ideologically inscribed and the materially subversive body as two sides of the same coin, and simultaneously argue that the ideology-critical, ironic *corporeagraphic metafiction* on the inescapable social inscription of bodies, and the alternative, polyphonic narratives of the subversive, corporeally motivated, internally vibrating *body-text* are inherently interrelated in Carter's fiction.

Although Brooks' *Body Work* also regards the body both a socio-cultural discursive construct and a trans-linguistic physical entity, in my view, his interest in the first aspect, in "getting writing onto the body" seems to predominate over his preoccupation with the second, with "getting the body into writing." He concentrates more on the signifying body as a site of ideological inscriptions in the inescapable symbolic field of signification, and neglects the corporeality's subversive capacity to infiltrate, infect and destabilize the text. Conforming to Brooks' argumentation, the *somatization* of the text, the embodiment of meaning refers to the desired body's becoming a key signifying factor in the text, a key to satisfaction, to power and meaning, as the knowledge of the body implies an exposition of truth, an access to the symbolic order and a mastery of the very creation of significance in the

text. (Brooks 1993, 8) For me, the *somatization* of the text dramatizes not only how the *semioticized* body composes meaning, but more importantly how it decomposes it, not only how the body is incorporated by the symbolic representation but how it transgresses it by introducing corporeality at the heart of the system to be deconstructed, and offering endless play instead of an ultimate truth. My thorough close-reading of the *somatized* text undertakes to reveal how the body's trans-linguistic materiality, the speaking subject's unspeakable corporeal reality, the embodied voice, the irregular discourse of undecipherable, fantastically metamorphosing bodies trouble—probably regardless of authorial intention—symbolic representation, conventional language use, canonized narrative tradition and reading habits, as well as ideologically prescribed order, naturalized normative identity categories, and ready-made truths. Focusing on the relationship of body and text, I shall analyze what Carter refers to, when she described her over-writing style with a bodily metaphor, locating even her own corporeality within the text, claiming: "I half-suffocate them with the enthusiasm with which I wrap my arms and legs around them" (Carter in Haffenden 1985, 91).

Beyond the inescapable, ideologically interpellated body I pay a special attention to its fictional subversions. I reveal how the uncontrollable ambivalence of the mockingly burlesque, jovially vulgar, celebratory sublime, uncannily abject grotesque corporeality infiltrates, vibrates the language of the novel, producing a violently self-deconstructive, ruptured or a playfully carnivalesque, ambiguous text, an excessive, overflowing style, a corpus in constant metamorphosis, manifested in the three novels respectively via a regurgitating discourse, a laughing language, or a flirtatious narrative. I examine how Carter's fantastic, freakish 'female' bodies become structuring and disintegrating elements of the plot, how they multiply, entangle or spin the narrative thread, and how they invade the language-use, the writing style of the whole text. I study parallel spectacular, seductive and tricky corporeal- and textual performances, aiming to show how the grotesque heroines' parading-parodic deconstructive performances of the ideologically prescribed femininity, of the normatively idealized feminine body and its limiting representations coincide with the Carterian narrative's spectacular revisions of literary genres and styles, which are identified by canon-shaping discursive technologies of power (Foucault 1980) as feminine, thus less valuable writings.

The concept of the *body-text* certainly recalls Julia Kristeva's *revolutionary poetic language* in which the repressed instinctual drives, the trans-discursive corporeal rhythm, repetition and musicality (a haunting heritage of the pre-symbolic semiotic realm of the primary union with the mother) (re)emerge within the symbolic system to introduce heterogeneity into signification, to produce polysemic meanings and pleasurable non-sense, to

destabilize the language, unsettle the identity and decenter the subject, while reflecting crises within social structures and ideological institutions. (Kristeva 1980, 125, 133 and 1985) Although the Carterian narrative, as a notorious demythologizer of motherhood, resists the Kristevian view of considering the source of textual/corporeal revolution as a maternal space, my interpretation of Carter focuses on the relationship of the *feminized* body and text. I am also highly indebted to Kristeva's theory in so far as my idea of the inherently intertwined *corporeagraphic metafiction* and *body-text* echoes the Kristevian concept of the *symbolic* and *semiotic* modalities as well as the Kristevian *phenotext* and *genotext*[17] (Kristeva 1984, 88 and 1985, 22). Moreover, the analytical method used here resembles Kristeva's in the sense that the narrative overflows, blindspots, and antagonisms, all resulting from the carnevalization, the self-freaking self-destabilization of the narrative, are considered to be revelative symptoms of the somatization of the text. In other words, the textual expenditures, absences, cleavages, gaps and slips are regarded as holes on the clothing of the text which allow for getting a view of the very flesh, the body in its heterogeneous, grotesque reality.

Through intertwining the study of the metamorphosis of the heterogeneous body with the study of the dynamic (de)composition of a kaleidoscopic, polyphonic (inter)textual corpus, I outline an analysis of the *subject- and meaning in process/on trial* in the Kristevian sense of the terms. I explore Kristeva's *penitentiary condition* of knowledge and semiology, this ambiguity—akin to the textual fusion of corporeographic metafiction and body-text—which implies that "imprisoned in meaning is to take into account the trials of meaning, walled into the transcendental ego is to outline the course of the subject on trial, in process: *en procès*" (Kristeva 1985a, 216). Following Kristeva's renewed semiology (doing away with the concept of the self-sufficient, closed, transcendental, Cartesian ego, who masters transparent meanings and mimetic representations of a graspable world) I wish to take account of both the sense and the subject as a permanent dialectic process, a heterogeneous dynamic, endowed with the intrinsic capacity of challenging the logical imprisonment via a catastrophic internal subversion, that allows for the expansion of the limits of the signifiable, and for an opening up to the remnant of signification, to this unnameable emptiness experienced as the body itself. (Kristeva 1985a, 212-4). In the followings, my aim is to show how this Kristevian *sujet en procès* and the left-over of sense are embodied in Carter's fiction by the grotesque body generating its subversively *somatized* narratives.

2. Carter's Grotesque Bodies: Freaks, Ethics and Fun

In Carter, what puts the subject on trial, enhances the crisis of signification, transgresses identity categories, and (de)composes the narrative via the corporeally motivated *body-text* is the freakish grotesque body.

i. The Carnivalesque Grotesque Body

The Carterian heroines', the androgynous, metamorphosing Eve/lyn's, the winged, giantess Fevvers', or the aged, over-decorated Chance-twins' bodies all clearly fit into the subversive category of the *carnivalesque grotesque*. Mikhail Bakhtin in his famous study on Medieval Carnival and Rabelais' art characterises the *carnivalesque grotesque* by the transgressive corporeality's destabilising potential, allowing for a temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and the established order, for a suspension of all hierarchical ranks, privileges, norms and prohibitions, and for a spectacular, universal feast of Change embracing all the people. (Bakhtin 1968, 11) The Carterian heroines mock and reject the classical body. They refuse to be transcendentally monumental, disciplined, static, self-contained, symmetrical and homogeneous. Instead they embrace all aspects of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque grotesque body, through gaining excessively ambiguous, changing, unfinished, irregular, heterogeneous, and over-all material embodiments (Bakhtin 1968, 29).

Indeed, Carter's novels can be easily interpreted as fictional illustrations of the Bakhtinian theory of the carnivalesque. Carter's "demythologizing business" (Carter 1983, 71) repeats the carnival's joyous relativization of truths, norms and authorities, as she rewrites fossilized myths, canonized mastertexts, and conventional representations to perform a limited yet joyous revolution, a subversion from within, fuelled by grotesque bodies. The bodies in her fiction are ambiguous like the androgyn's, the bird-woman's, or the hag-seductress'. They are irregular due to sex-changes, wing-like protuberances, or physical duplications. They are monstrous, hideous and ugly from the point of view of classic aesthetics (praising the ready-made and completed). The incarnation of perfect femininity turns out to be a freakish performance doubled by/on a transvestite and a trans-sexual. The magnificent winged woman off-stage transforms into a hunch-back-like cripple. The aging women, losing her validity as a seductress, becomes a hag, an annoying paradox or simply invisible due to her marginalized identity-markers (gender, age, class). The Carterian bodies are excessive. They revel (though always with a touch of self-irony) in gluttony, vanity, or debauchery, and are portrayed submerged in troubling materiality during copulation, pregnancy, aging, devouring, digesting, disgorging, decaying, dismemberment, or disintegration. They are heterogeneous, mingling sublime and abject, hilarious and horrific,

pretended simulacrum and material reality. They are open, ever-changing and unfinished, as they locate their confidence-trickster, self-stylizing selves in the constant transitory state of 'becoming' (particularly of 'becoming (a-)woman'[18]). In Carter we find even more explicit intertextual tributes to the Bakhtinian *carnivalesque grotesque.* The colossal aerialiste Fevvers' "grand, vulgar, careless generosity" coupled with an "enormous appetite," "gigantic coquetry," and "gargantuan enthusiasm" (Carter 1994, 12, 21, 22), evoke Rabelais' giant, Gargantua. Likewise, the tipsily giggling septaguenarian Chance twinsisters in charge of a twin-babycarriage at the end of *WC* ironically mime the Kerch terracotta tableaux's figurines of laughing pregnant old hags, who embody, along with Gargantua, Bakhtin's *par excellence* examples of the carnivalesque grotesque (Bakhtin 1968, 25).

In Carter, the peak of the carnivalesque grotesque is constituted by the narratives' closures. The ineradicably masculine, essentially feminized male-to-female transgender subject's final fecundation by a hyper-feminine transvestite male stages the peculiar carnivalesque logic of inside-out, turn-about and continual shifting, producing micro- and macrocosmic crisis. The aerial giantess' final spiralling tornado of laughter fuses the carnival's triumphant yet self-mocking merriment (resulting from the awareness of the interconnectedness of limits and their transgression). The senile, illegitimate Chance sisters becoming foster-mothers of the newborn bastard offspring of their family (thus postponing and welcoming their own, individual death (via the rebirth of the community)) perform a carnivalesque celebration of rebirth in death, of the margin in the center, of bastard in the authoritative official. Moreover, the novel's endings are carnivalesque in the sense that they remain open-ended, incomplete, playful, "orgasmic finales" (Sage). Fevvers 'resolves' the riddle of her identity (fact or fiction?, bird or woman?) by disclosing it as unresolvable with a universal laughter inviting everyone in the whole world to join in. Eve/lyn 'terminates' his/her wandering by sailing away in the ocean, and out of the text, pregnant with a child and new stories to come. Dora and Nora 'complete' tracing their auto-portrait by disappearing singing in the moonlit streets, accompanied by their doubled shadows. As carnivalesque grotesque figures, they all invite audience interaction, and encourage readers to participate in their laughter, their journey, their song, and to share with them the pleasures of the text.

ii. The Female Grotesque Body

Mary Russo enriches the Bakhtinian grotesque body by attributing it with a gender: the focus of her interest shifts from the ungendered, carnivalesque to the specifically *female* grotesque body. My analysis of the Carterian bodies and texts is significantly indebted to Russo's original study, *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess and Modernity* (1995) insofar as

it regards the grotesque body as a cultural construction, an operation through which genders, identities and their narratives are constituted and deconstituted. Treading in the footsteps of Russo, I examine how the Carterian heroines' spectacular self-freakings grotesquely de-form the 'normal' female body as a cultural construction with the aim to reclaim it, to "suggest new political aggregates," "conflictual coalitions of bodies which both respect the concept of situated knowledges and refuse to keep every body in its place" (Russo 1995, 16, 179).

However, unlike Russo, I do not wish to emphasize the perilous, marginalizing, misogynist aspects of grotesque representations, which highlight patriarchal ideology's sexism (along with its agism, racism, aestheticism, normativism, all aiming to abjectify femininity). Thus, I shall not concentrate upon or criticize clichés like the mortifying *vagina dentata*, Bakhtin's senile hags, Carnival's Lady Skimmington (a man cross-dressed and humiliated as a woman), or deformed, pathologized, 'othered' bodies of expectant, aging, obese, disabled, unruly, or hysteric women—stereotypes which easily slide from these 'archaic' tropes of the female grotesque to the naturalization (, the effacement of the social constitution) of abnormality and of its exclusion (Russo 1995, 2).

I disagree with critics, like Kate Webb, who claim that the model of carnival, of the carnivalesque grotesque is ill-suited for femininity. Webb's arguments seem to me simplifying, populist (her claim that carnival always has violent consequences on women), biologist (her claim that carnival contradicts the inherently 'positive' feminine attributes of mothering and connecting) or simply reversing binary opposites (her claim that in *WC*, Uncle Perry embodies the carnivalesque versus Dora who stands for the limits). Webb's idea, that the carnivalesque is incompatible with femininity because "being a woman already signifies being in drag," (Webb 1994, 301-306) neglects that in Carter's world men also emphatically act, perform *roles* prescribed by (or subverting) their gender. (In *NC* Walser personifies the objective reporter, the amoroso, and the clown, in *PNE* Eve/lyn stages the misogynist macho, while in *WC* Melchior enacts his respected father's role as king of high theatre, and Peregrine plays conjurer, vagabond, adventurer). In fact, the Carterian trilogy can be analyzed as a metatext on our all performing (our bodies, genders and identities as) roles as players in all the world that is a stage. Besides ironically commenting upon the discursive (de)construction of identity via the self-fictionalizing narrative aspect, or upon the ideological mechanism of truth-production via the historiographic metafictional layer, Carter's heroines highlight the performative, repetitive, artificial, self-stylizing and relative nature of gender through 'enacting gender with a difference,' spectacularly fusing their femininity with grotesque characteristics. Thus, staging Judith Butler's internally-subversive *gender-trouble* (Butler

1990) they identify not so much with Russo's conventionally coded *female grotesque* but rather with a *feminist* version of the grotesque, re-embodied by a mockingly dis/re-identifying, de/re-feminizing, even trans-gender or self-queering identity, dwelling in the metamorphic state of 'becoming *a(-)woman*,' a marvellously monstrous un-womanly woman.

Mary Russo also argues that the spectacularized female body is in considerable danger in the carnivalesque public space. (Women have been either raped during the festivities, or identified with the style of the performance and thus, have become estranged from the liberatory or trangressive effects of their own bodies reduced to signs, to perpetuate misogynistic representations). (Russo 1995, 59) However, it must be emphasised that as opposed to Russo who reflects on the original, medieval carnival analysed by Bakhtin, Carter presents precisely a feminist rewriting of the carnivalesque tradition, during which a daring risking of the subject, an opening up to its heterogeneity provides for empowering identities via self-made, de/re-constructed grotesque embodiments.

Dale Bauer criticizes Bakhtin for taking the side of the victors over the victims in his metaphor of the battle, and quotes Russo to agree with her that female grotesques are indeed "repressed and underdeveloped" (Bauer 1981, 678, Russo 219). Yet, Bauer also attempts to consider female grotesques' "stupidity" and "incomprehension" as forms of resistance. In her view, the grotesque "female fools" have the potential—particularly due to their carnivalized bodies, masquerading selves, and assertive defiant voices—to reveal and reinterpret unspoken repressions, and defamiliarize naturalized conventions, to confuse accepted languages, and dialogically unsettle polemicized authoritative voices. They can "shake up interpretive communities which do not acknowledge the excluded margins" and invite readers to challenge and restructure the cultural, intertextual frames which constitute the female grotesque as a stupid fool (Bauer 1981, 678-679). I find Bauer's argumentation particularly relevant for Carter's texts. Although the Carterian heroines are by no means naïve or stupid, repressed or underdeveloped, but they do enact and paraphrase spectacularly the stereotypically feminized sexy silliness or hystrionic hysterics or marvellous monstrosity with the aim to turn their implied readers into fools, and to mockingly quarrel with all those who misread as natural given their performance designed to parody their cultural construction. Moreover, conforming to Bauer's pertinent insights, not only do foolish women "on the threshold" of a sociocultural crisis become subversively powerful in the marginal realm constituting the carnival world, but the female grotesque also has a theoretical significance. According to Bauer, "coming to know [and reevaluate] the other is at the heart of the feminist act of reading [disclosed as an engendering process], just as it is at the heart of the [female

grotesque] characters coming to know themselves as other in a world where patriarchal language [and hegemonic order] aspires to monologism" (Bauer 1981, 677).

iii. The Feminist Grotesque, Self-freaking Body and Freak Ethics

During the ideological constitution of the subject and the cultural inscription of the body, in Western patriarchal societies women are deprived of the masculine prerogative of universal, unified, rational and autonomous subjectivity by being inherently identified with corporeality (--that is a corporeality sexualized, pathologized, or mystified, rendered sublime or abject, conforming to the stereotypes of Virgin, Whore, and Mother: of the Impenetrable, the Corrupted/ive, and the Pregnant Body). As Sidonie Smith argues, in contrast with the *disembodied*, masculinized universal subject position, woman is identified with the *other*, the repressed and denied body. She and her corporeality are banished to the borders of consciousness through the ideological enshrinement of Bakhtin's *classical body*, and through the consequent objectification and marginalization of the deviant, feminized body, in an insidious ideological process "whereby others whose bodies are identified as culturally 'grotesque' become more fully body" (Smith 1993, 6-7). Smith continues her argumentation by claiming that, on the one hand, woman is inherently inescapably identified with the debasing *cultural grotesque* through her engendering, ideological bodily inscriptions, her *cultural embodiment*, and/yet, on the other hand, she also becomes a carnivalesque monstrosity, a cultural grotesque in the case she resists, if she claims her own equal powers of self-conscious reasoning, if she contests her negative identification with the socially condemned yet disciplined body, and risks to pursue her own desires and seek independence from men. (Smith 1993, 15-16) Conforming to this logic, there are no options for women, one way or another, she will become a cultural grotesque, located in a disabling position due to her culturally prescribed and despised embodiment. Nevertheless, Smith consecrates an entire book (*Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body. Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century* (1993), that considerably inspired my study) to explore how the "inexactly excluded" body identified with the cultural grotesque may find strategies through which to negotiate the calls to ideologically provided subjectivities along with the laws of the genre of autobiography, and to study how embodiment may become a source of subversive practice, a potentially emancipatory vehicle for self-writing practices. In my opinion, in Carter too it is precisely this culturally condemned grotesque body that can become the engine of feminist subversion, since it has the capacity to destabilize both the illusory disembodiment of the universal masculine subject and to question and over-write the limiting ideological embodiment of the feminized object, through *re-embodying* the feminine as feminist freak.

In Jonathan Dollimore's terms, the Carterian female grotesque body equals the *paradoxical perverse* that generates internal instabilities precisely *within* the repressive system, as it is "a transgressive agency inseparable from a dynamic intrinsic to social process." Accordingly, this female grotesque body's *transgressive reinscription* has the capacity to intensify those instabilities by turning them against the norms through reintroducing the repressed, the displaced, the suppressed via the proximate (Dollimore 1991, 33) that is repeated with a difference, with the aim to turn the femininized female grotesque into feminist grotesque. The re-visioning Carter seems to agree with Dollimore who insists on the *cultural dynamics of transgressive reinscription*, arguing that the repetitive identification *with*, the desire *for*, and the self-reflexive parodic subversion *of* a subject position may coexist with each other, and thus, may enable not so much the true knowledge of oneself, but rather the knowledge of one's discursive formations "in the process of living, and inverting them, reinscribing oneself within, succumbing to, and demystifying them" (Dollimore 306).

Judith Butler puts forward a very similar argument in her *Bodies that Matter*, when she claims that subjects are formed by an *exclusionary matrix* that requires "the simultaneous production of a domain of abject beings, those who are not yet 'subjects' but who form the *constitutive outside* to the domain of the subject," an abjected outside that is after all in the inside of the subject as its founding repudiation. In Butler's view, the abject designates the uninhabitable zones of social life, marking the culturally unintelligible, unarticulable, uncontrollable inhuman (in my analysis, the freakish grotesque female corporeality) that, nevertheless, as a *constitutive instability* of the hegemonic position allows for the "disruptive return of the excluded from within the very logic of [the prevailing powerstructure's] heterosexual symbolic," and that proves to be a potential critical resource in the struggle to rearticulate the very terms of symbolic legitimacy and intelligibility. (Butler, like Carter, sees the same *constitutive instability* in the reiterative nature of gender performance, carrying a deconstituting possibility in the very process of repetition, able to put the consolidation of norms of sex into potentially productive crisis.) (Butler 1993, 3, 12)

In my study I underline how the heroines exploit their grotesque bodies' empowering potentials for alternative, non-normative, anti-aesthetic female identities and revisionary feminist readings of texts on the body and of bodies in the text. Via a feminist re-reading of Bakhtin's theory on the *carnivalesque grotesque*, inspired by Russo's *The Female Grotesque*, I reveal how the Carterian *feminist grotesque*'s double world-view and ambiguous nature intertwines dichotomies and transcends hierarchical binary logic, how its material excess violates limits with the aim to subvert fossilized systems and myths, to resist closure, and

preferably initiate differences, and how its infinite metamorphosis provides an able model to describe women's heterogeneous experience of their polysemic (both ideologically disciplined *and* materially subversive) bodies, and of their paradoxically positioned (objectified, feminized *and* subjected masculinized; corporealized *and* desexualized; aestheticized ***and*** pathologized; eroticized *and* asceticized) subjectivities, and in the long run, how its openness assures enough space for a feminist revision of body, identity and text alike. With Russo, I illuminate "the grotesque as a process through which differently gendered bodies are deployed in provocative, new, and possibly transformative ways" (Russo 1995, i).

In my opinion, Carter deciphers and revolutionarily re-invents what Russo calls the "stereotypical grotesque codings of the female body in Western culture" (Russo 1996, 15). The Carterian revisions of the Fat Lady and the Monstrous Hysteric (embodied by *NC*'s histrionic giantess aerialiste, Fevvers), of the Female Impersonator and the Starving Woman (embodied by *PNE*'s transgender and bulimic Eve/lyn and transvestite and anorectic Tristessa), or of the Unruly Woman, the Aging Woman and the Siamese Twins (embodied by *WC*'s flirtatious, grey-haired Chance twin-sisters), all open the way towards daring, non-normative "grotesque body- and identity politics'" sisterly solidarity, towards an innovative, dynamic model of new social subjectivity, towards new ways of reading ourselves by starting out "on the side of the freak" (Russo 1996, 12).

I find the term 'freak' particularly useful for describing Carter's feminist grotesque, her *freak ethics* and her heroines' *self-freaking identities*, because the term 'freak' shall never evoke the contained-transgressive, democratically communal, joyous celebration of the term 'grotesque' implied by the Bakhtinian 'carnivalesque grotesque' that is probably the most frequently associated with the term 'grotesque'. On the contrary, 'freak' denotes the 'unnatural(ized),' the peculiarly unusual labelled deviant or degenerate, that must be excluded, *othered* as a hopelessly uncontrollable and incomprehensible *par excellence otherness*, forever threatening, tempting and irritating from the margins.[19]

The 'freak' is not a handicapped person with major disabling biological deficiencies, (she is not blind, mute or paralysed), but a person endowed with dysfunctional, 'meaningless' corporeal appendages (the bearded lady, the elephant-man), alternate anatomic forms (the dwarf, the giant), or supplementary bodily capacities (the man with three arms, or extra-fingers), differences which are culturally coded as incurably inhuman, or abnormal.[20] (see Bogdan 1990)

Throughout human history the freak takes as various shapes as the *sacer* (sacred and profane) monster mediating between the natural and the cosmic world, the human oddity

exhibited at the 19th century freak-show or circus side-show, the victim of race-cleansing, eugenic Nazi concentration camps, the other turned into symbol on the banner of the 1960s revolutionary human rights movements and counter-politics, or the commodified human-curiosities starring the most popular TV shows of our contemporary society of spectacle. (MTV's stunt-show's *Jackass'* stars feature a midget and a fat man who suffer injuries from crazy performances fusing elements of circus-act and extreme sports, or are simply beaten up in various 'inventive' (supposedly comic) manners in each episode). The 'genuine,' culturally marginalised freak, instead of being embraced in a communal, carnivalesque celebration, is consistently scapegoated (is pathologised, hyper-sexualized, objectified, and deprived of her subjectivity) in order to reinforce in the status of the 'other' the normality of the self-same. The historical emergence of the cultural process of *othering* can be dated back to the 17th century's *Great Confinement* described by Michel Foucault and Francis Barker, as the process whereby the society's unwanted, 'freakish' elements—the sick, the poor, the orphaned, the unemployed, the homeless, the criminal, the mad—who had been integrally present, visible in society, are gradually dispossessed (by ideological state apparatuses as the prison or the madhouse studied by Foucault), and become reduced to the status of detritus through their being separated, excluded, and made invisible (as well as useful via regulative labour) in order to guarantee the foundation of the then emerging, by now fossilized normal(ized)/normative modern bourgeois subjectivity. (Barker 1984, 1-71, Foucault 1984, 124-141) The freak embodies the feared 'other, secret self within,' in so far as it constitutes a screen upon which repressed cultural anxieties and desires can be projected. In Western societies, we live in the age of the "last metaphorical shift in the status of monsters" (Braidotti 1994, 92). As the last 'real,' physical freaks disappear due to the development of medical sciences and the mandatory prenatal care provided by social security, new 'imaginary,' 'invented' freaks take over contemporary popular culture characterised by an increasing fascination for the fantastic and freakish, surfacing in the last few decades' epidemic fandom for freaks as Ziggy Stardust, Michael Jackson, Lolo Ferrari, Marylin Manson, Lara Croft, Star Trek heroes, or the Teletubbies.[21]

The Carterian heroines of the final trilogy identify themselves by starting out from this culturally othered, (un)natural(ized) freak. Throughout their self-destabilizing performances they overplay their differences. Tristessa self-consciously and Eve/lyn unwillingly enact all imaginable clichés of femininity. Fevvers dyes her feathers polychromatic, and emphasizes her giantly physical ungainliness even during her aerialiste-somersaults. Dora and Nora Chance use exaggerated make-up to decorate their doubled septuagenarian seductress mask-

faces. In the Carterian spectacular and self-ironic 'feminist freak-show,' Fevvers enacts histrionically the Fat Hysteric BirdWoman, Eve/lyn and Tristessa over-identify with the Starving and Devouring She-Man, while Dora mockingly overdoes the Unruly Siamese Old Crone. Their aim is to replace the concept of dangerous and disabling 'difference' with the notion of 'alterity' that carries potentials of cultural criticism and destabilisation, individual and collective empowerment for the marginalized, via enabling an alternative, *non-othering* but *self-freaking* identity politics starting out on the side of the *other* as kernel of the self.

As for Carter's writing style, her freakish heroines also perform *narrative freak-shows*, *textual grotesqueries* and *stylistic self-freakings*, while overwriting hyper-feminine—loquacious, capricious, flirtatious—discourses with the feminist aim of subverting and 'ungendering' them, to revision these 'othered' genres' and styles' canonical mis-positioning, and to reclaim their pleasures. Their magical realist narratives provide a 'view from elsewhere,' making us "see the recognisable world through transformed eyes" (Punter in Peach 8), through presenting magical happenings in a matter of fact tone as indubitable parts of reality, and defamiliarising the ordinary illuminated from alternative perspectives as astonishing. After a revelative journey to Japan, teaching her "what it means to be a woman and an other" (Carter 1983, 70), Carter's fiction becomes increasingly philosophical and speculative, so that—rendering even her own culture as foreign—she can perform a less biased form of cultural criticism aware of relativity, plural perspectives, alternative versions of reality, and possible other worlds. Her final heroines' mock-autobiographical narratives emphatically focus on the 'differring grotesquerie,' the 'internal freak', 'the other within' through fictionalized versions of identity, always pretending to be someone else, enacting invented personas in a carnivalesque imbroglio of 'me's and 'not-me's.

A caring embracement of the marginalized, 'unnaturalized,' freakish *other* is multiply realized in Carter's fiction. As I suggested earlier, the Chinese-box-like-structure (a Carterian leitmotif) of the novels hosts a magical realist, picaresque, self-fictionalizing mock-autobiographical surface-story that contains a feminist, ideology-critical *corporeagraphic metafiction* that embraces a corporeally motivated, self-decomposing *body-text*. Similarily, the heroine's bodies simultaneously embrace signs of idealised, beautified femininity, and of anti-aesthetic, freakish deviation and distortion. The re-invented grotesque persona paradoxically or ironically overplays the ideologically disciplined and dominated identity-markers (eg. through performing a hyper-femininity). The self-identity created definitely refuses to be based upon the exclusion of the *other*, or upon a frustrating "sacrificial entry" into the socio-symbolic order founded on the expulsion of a rejected element, "a scapegoat

charged with the evil of which the community duly constituted can purge itself:" it is unwilling to sign the phallogocentric contract based on a relationship of separation and articulation of differences (see Kristeva 1992, 199, 202). Instead, this identity-construction relies on relationality, connectedness, solidarity, caring, and a loving embracement, "female-centered values[...]that are arguably human values that should be cultivated in both women and men" (Baum 2004, 1096). An embracing love of the *other* is conceived as a (potential) part of one's heterogeneous self (that nevertheless respects the singularity, the individuality of the other, and lacks the will to homogenize it). Thus, Carter's *feminist grotesque* constitutes the basis of an entire *feminist freak ethics*, in which the mothering (merely symbolically maternal, otherwise ungendered) *embracement*, the caring love of the *other* sharply contrasts the patriarchal *cannibalism* that violently incorporates the *other* to discipline, exclude and repress it, and define it negatively *against* himself. Instead of the ideologically-invested othering, that imposes disabling differences upon others to reinforce one's self-identity, the Carterian heroines opt for opening ourselves up to "reciprocal othernesses" entailing negotiations between exciting, heterogeneous beings whose "alterities" (Grosz 1994, 192, Bordo 1993, 41) enrich each other through an exchange that instead of aggressively remodeling them, leaves and loves them(selves) 'deformed' as they are.

This freak ethics of embracement is revisited by various feminist theoreticians[22] (see Porter 1999). Nancy Chodorow claims that the dichotomously gendered selfhood—reinforcing the autonomy/relationality split and enhancing very different intersubjective relationships and moral comportments—is due to the fact that the primary caretakers of all children are women, whom girls learn to identify with, and boys are thought to differentiate from. As a result, the feminine sense of the self is founded on relationality and caring, while males protect their ego-boundaries through disconnecting from others and differentiation (especially from the overwhelming feminine (m)other). (Chodorow 2000, Friedman 1997, 43)

Carol Gilligan, inspired by Chodorow, introduces her feminist *ethics of care* also referred to as a *morality of responsibility* as an alternative theory of moral development for women. She challenges Lawrence Kohlberg's *ethics of justice* considered to be the peak of moral maturing and unreachable for women. Gilligan praises—instead of abstract, normative, universal ethical principles of the masculine *morality of rights* and reason—women's strategies in solving moral dilemmas and taking ethical decisions, driven by intimate relationality, sensitive contextualization, respectful tolerance, compassionate empathy with otherness, interdependence, mutual help and altruistic caring. (Gilligan 1982, 5-23, and 1986)

Similarily, Marilyn Friedman suggests that self-realization and social interrelationship are not mutually exclusive categories, given that a relational conception of autonomy can be outlined through the example of female caretakers. (Friedman 1997, 41-59) Donna Haraway defines loving care as learning how to see faithfully from an*other*'s point of view, and she heralds related women's values, such as partial perspective, situated knowledge, relationality, solidarity, vulnerability and humour as major constituents of feminist empowerment and agency (Haraway 1991). Margaret R. Somers and Gloria D. Gibson argue in favour of a new politics of identity and theories of agency—which are to be reintroduced by people previously marginalized from dominant social spheres and silenced by mainstream public narratives—with the innovative aim to transform otherness into variation, to free difference from normative devaluation, and restore the respect of previously disdained differences as female care-taking, being in relations and solidarity (Somers and Gibson 1994, 53).

Alison Weir criticizes the "sacrificial logic" which defines Western identity—based on a misreading of Hegel[23]—through constant negativity, a struggle for mastery over an otherness that cannot be mastered, and she proposes to replace the masculine model of "self-identity as domination" by an alternative self-assertion built on the development of intersubjective relationships, active dialogue and mutual recognition instead of separation, opposition and negation of/to the other. Her re-interpretation of Hegel suggests that "embodiment must be seen as self-expression, self-completion, rather than self-negation" and that "self-consciousness requires not the simple, abstract negation of the body which renders it permanently other, but the dialectical negation which negates its otherness" (Weir 1996, 21).

Julia Kristeva talks about a *heretics of love*, when the subject metaphorically identifies with the mother who conceives the *other* (synonymous with her child) as natural, inevitable, someone "who has come out of myself, which is yet not myself but a flow of unending germinations, an eternal cosmos." She believes that this "motherly peace of mind" gnaws at the symbolic order's almightiness, bypasses perverse negation and constitutes the basis of the social bond by resembling others, and thus, fosters a "slow, difficult and delightful apprenticeship in attentiveness, gentleness, forgetting oneself." (Kristeva 1987, 262-3, and 1992, 206). (Moreover, in Kristeva's view, this (her)ethical motherly love—which provides law with flesh, language and jouissance—pacifies in times of crisis when the "symbolic shell cracks and a crest emerges where speech causes biology to show through [...]at the time of illness, of sexual, intellectual, physical passion, of death..." (Kristeva 1987, 262).) Paradoxically, it is through this radical splitting of the subject ("redoubling of the body, separation and coexistence of the self and of an other, of nature and consciousness, of

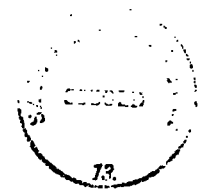
physiology and speech" (Kristeva 1992, 206))—emerging in the (her)ethics introduced by the experience of maternal love or the communally shared esthetic experience (particularly of contemporary art with a transgressive discourse closer to the body, emotions and the unnameable repressed by the social contract)—that discriminating differentiations shall be done away with, and a (pro)creative totality shall be reached.

Accordingly, the emergence of the troubling *body-text* in Carter does not necessarily contribute to a painful dissolution of the subject, but to an epiphanic meeting with the *other* recognized as oneself, to a shared laughter initiated by the freak inviting for identification. (From this perspective, all of Carter's analysed novels can be regarded as tales of love.) Focusing on Carter's self-othering, feminist grotesque heroines, I find particularly fitting Sarah Lucia Hoagland's metaphor of "caring amazons," referring to those autonomous yet sensitive individuals who are "concerned with challenging the inequities resulting from the values of the fathers" ((Hoagland 1991, 201).

The feminist ethics "starting out on the side of the freak" (Russo 1995, 12) takes various fictional forms in Carter's novels. In *NC*, the winged giantess Fevvers rejects the corrective and 'scapegoating,' anxious and compensatory laughter (i.e. of the Freudian tendentious jokes) at the expense of others; she refuses the expulsion of the *other* for the purgation of the community. (As a consequence, the clowns and their terrible laughter are blown away, out of her text by a whirlwind). Instead, she propagates the healing powers of a universally shared, carnivalesque merriment, solidarity's sisterly laughter *with* the others, hailing the regenerative potentials of heterogeneity introduced within the heart of the society (and of the text and the body). Her mock-autobiographical reminiscences accounted in an interview embrace the life narratives of other marginalized female grotesque creatures (suffragette prostitutes from Ma Nelson's brothel, distorted freaks from Madame Schreck's Museum of Woman Monsters, weird hoofers from the circus, social outcasts from the Panoptical prison) for whom she attests her solidarity by providing them visibility, audibility, by recording their stories within her story and *His*tory. Ironically, it is the rational male journalist, Walser who is made to pen down their (fictionalized) (auto)biographies, as the male *auktor* is seduced to become "the amanuensis of all those whose tales we've yet to tell him, the histories of those woman who would otherwise go down nameless and forgotten, erased from history as if they had never been" (Carter 1994, 285). Moreover, Fevvers' midget foster-mother, the socialist, feminist, anarchist, household-magician Lizzie's constant interruptions turn Fevvers' narrative even more explicitly polyphonic, an open space hosting, caringly mothering a multiplicity of other voices.

Even *PNE*'s painful, textual/corporeal self-decomposition traces a feminist ethically invested variant of the grotesque, which permits the ruthlessly deconstructed, un/re-gendered characters to discover in each other mirror-images of them(selves,) as inherently freaked entities (very far from the unified body's ideal image of the Lacanian mirror-stage). During her passion Eve/lyn is faced with a multiplicity of mirrors: in his narcissistic lover's boudoir-mirrors, in her operating room's looking glass' medical gaze, in the troublingly kaleidoscopic reflections of Tristessa's glass-castle (s)he is repeatedly defaced to realize that we are all 'someone else' insofar as the 'image' (reflected by the mirror or imposed upon us by the society) is experienced as separate from us, and insofar as the varying context (dependent on our relations, our (his)stories)) shapes the reflected 'reality(s).' Thus, Evelyn matures into Eve then Eve/lyn in the sense that (s)he succeeds in understanding subjectivity as a picaresque- or passion-like process, as well as in realising identity as a relational entity.

The feminist grotesque's *heretics of love* (Kristeva 1987) and caring embracement of the *other* peaks in Carter's swan-song, *WC*, a novel starring identical twin sisters who are exact imitations of the other which is also the self, and an over-decorated, nudist, beer-loving (foster)Grandma Chance who founds an "invented family" that welcomes all outcasts regardless of class, age, race, or even species. Dora and Nora Chance are retired showgirls who celebrate their 75th birthday by cunningly turning the spectacularization of their female grotesque, 'hag-seductress' selves into a feminist empowerment, celebrating an ethics of care. Through staging themselves as the multiply othered freak, who is poor, working class, illegitimate, old, female and degenerately plural/split/half, they perform multiple subversions. They undertake to "hijack the [male] gaze" (Gamble 1997, 175), to unveil the ideology (power-investments and gendered distribution) of spectatorship, visibility or representation. Ironically they reveal how the marginalized 'other' embodied by the senile 'hag-seductress' Chance twins—these fascinating and repulsive 'in-between beings,' (in-between nymphette and old crone, self and other, liveliness and decay, naturalness and artificiality, feminine and masculine)—fulfil the role of Butler's *constitutive outside* (Butler 1993, 3) through defining the limits, the excluded 'beyond' of normal, knowable, meaningful human subjectivity and corporeality. Dora and Nora resist *social confinement* (Barker 1984, 1-71) to reintroduce the othered detritus within the realm of the visible, as a part of 'normal reality,' and locate the freakish grotesque body as a source of (in)sight and solidarity, and as a basis of non-sacrificial, non-domination-based, communal identity.



iv. Theoretical Interfaces: (Sub)versions of the Grotesque

In my analysis of body and text in Carter's novels, Bakhtin's trope of the carnivalesque grotesque *social body* shall not only become, via Russo's female grotesque and Carter's feminist grotesque, an *engendered body*, but the macrodynamic aspect of this (ideologically interpellating or communally revolting) socially, historically situated *public body* will be complemented by the microdynamic (Kiss 1995, 15)[24] aspect of the tremulous *private body* psychically and physically destabilized by devastating or delighting experience of the freakish *other* invading the self.

Throughout my study I regard the 'grotesque freak' as a multifaceted phenomenon that surfaces under so diverse facets as Mikhail Bakhtin's *carnivalesque* (Bakhtin 1968), Julia Kristeva's *abjection* (Kristeva 1982), Sigmund Freud's *uncanny* (Freud 1953), Henri Bergson's *hilarious* (Bergson 2004), Charlie Chaplin's *burlesque* (Eisenstein 1946), Immanuel Kant's *sublime* (Kant 1973), Jean Baudrillard's *simulacrum* (Baudrillard 1994), or Susan Bordo's *body dysmorphia* (Bordo 1993), which all allow for the re-emergence of the 'other text' of troubling, transdiscursive corporeality, able to generate subversions of subjectivity, identity, body, text, and society, duly enacted by the Carterian heroines. I trace the salient connection between these theories, and read them in an intertextual unity with Carter's fiction so as to examine how the freakish heroines fuse different facets of the grotesque into one multifaceted mask they carve on their de-facing faces during their self-fictionalizing narratives which strangely result in the seemingly sincerest autoportrait ever. On the whole, this complex analysis of the grotesque freak enables a better understanding of our contemporary experience of the world, since the freak can be regarded as an iconic marker of our Western, post-industrial, consumer society of simulacrous spectacle and pseudo-hedonism. Carter's feminist grotesque, self-freaking body and text provides a model for coping with our paradoxical positioning as engendered, feminized, (an)aestheti(ci)zed and corporealized, silenced and over-narrated subjects of our patriarchal society.

Furthermore, I examine these theoretical intertexts in their relation with the different *laughters* provoked by the Carterian grotesque freaks. In *PNE* I analyse Eve/lyn's self-ironic smiles and bitter yet knowing sarcasm (matching the Baudrillardian simulacrum and the Bordoean dysmorphic distortions). In *NC* I study the birdwoman' communal, festive laughter (echoing the Bakhtinian carnivalesque), her spectators' enchanted laughter (echoing the Kantian sublime), the clowns' tempting-terrifying laughter (echoing the Kristevan abject and the Freudian uncanny), the circus audience's compensatory or exclusionary (Freudian tendentious wit-like or Bergsonian hilarious) laughter, and the minor child characters' pure

joie de vivre (echoing the Chaplinian burlesque). In *WC* I focus on the Chance sisters' soothing, seducing laughter (realizing the peak of the ethically invested feminist grotesque's solidarity in Carter). Exploring the complex Carterian comedy, I reveal not only the potentials and limits, but also the stakes and the responsibilities involved in a shared laughter *with* others versus a scape-goating laughter *at* others.

My interface of theory and fiction aims to support the validity of the category of the *grotesque* as an able model for heterogeneous, subversive feminist subjectivities based on solidarity.

v. The Semioticized Grotesque Body

In my study, I reveal how the grotesque body becomes textualized, semioticized in Carter's subversive narrative. The Carterian style, that elaborates on Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque language, echoes the playful, familiar speech of the fairs fuelled by a folk laughter, provoked by the uncontrollable, ecstatic material corporeality, and associated with polyphonic, polysemic ambivalence, jovial vulgarity, transgressive excess, and a delirious subversion of hierarchic, dichotomous, Logocentric social order. Carter's novels exploit the potential of freakishly somatized carnivalesque language with the specific feminist aim to undermine mysogynist master-narratives, to destabilize patriarchal representational habits and masculinized authorial positions, along with the limiting clichés of *phallogocentric discurse* and *écriture feminine* as mono-gendered and mutually exclusive categories.

Carter's widely thematized, theatricalized freakings of corporealities and of identitities spectacularly embracing otherness coincide with a stylistic freaking of the narrative infiltrated by grotesqueness. The fantastically overflowing Carterian narrative style seems to realize the initial meaning of the 'grotesque' denoting the 15th century Roman ornamental decorations which confuse strange, exaggerated, distorted vegetation, animal forms and human body parts in a marvellous yet realistic hybrid design, and an unnatural, irrational, fanciful manner, subverting freely the natural order of things via a simultaneously playful, hilarious and frivolous yet monstrous, ominous, incomprehensible effect (see Bakhtin 1968, 31, Russo 1995, 3, Kayser 29). This troubling grotesque imagery—persistent on ornamentations from the Antiquity, through the Middle Ages, to the Renaissance—recur semioticized in Carter's complex plots, metamorphosing subjects, tangled timelines, plural and open endings, her polyphonic narrative with complementary-contradictory voices, in her mannerist overwriting, her narrative slips, gaps, expenditures and ambiguities, her excessive over-accumulation of decorative tropes and figures, her revelry in catachresis and hyperboles, and in her mockingly feminine(/masculine) yet metafictionally feminist verbosity in a hybrid, magical realist

texture, a trans-generic, trans-gender writing. Furthermore, the etymological root of grotto-esque—the Italian *grotta* where the grotesque ornamentations were brought to light during the excavation of Titus' baths (Bakhtin 1968, 31)—evokes 'the cave,' associated with the cavernous, mysterious, earthly corporeality of the female body. This connotation of the 'grotesque' is revived by the Carterian heroines' *embodied* identities and *somatized* narratives which problematize in *corporeagraphic metafictions* the social constitution, the conventional representation and the cultural freaking of female bodies, with the aim to demystify, to deconstruct them as self-made, self-decomposing *body-texts*.

The Carterian grotesque body-text—whether fuelled by the devouring-disgorging body, the laughing body, or the seducing body—shares a major characteristic of fantastic literature described by Attila Kiss. Its deep-structural quest for the lost symbiosis with reality, for the immediacy of experience, its heterogeneous 'in-betweenness' and uncategorizable grotesque freakishness mark an attempt "to create an effect in the receiver that can mobilize energies that will produce an experience more totalizing than the conventional and the automatic, thus allowing for the psychically and corporeally motivated *geno-text*, 'the pleasure of the text,' to surface in the representation" (Kiss 2002, 26-27). I argue that in Carter's feminist grotesque fiction the pleasure of the text implies a communal, democratic sharing of joy, manifested in *PNE*'s accomplice-winking and self-ironic smiles resulting from our recognitions of our misrecognitions, in *NC*'s childish frenzy of laughter and *joie de vivre*, and *WC*'s sisterly burlesque, solidarity and daring mockery of Death. In a carnivalesque fashion, as the distinctions between actors and spectators, readers, characters and authors dissolve, all is invited to join in, to participate in the 'freaking' of body and text, and to share the laughter with Carter, with others, "with myself and with whoever notices" (see Carter in Katsavos 1994, 15).

3. Corporeagraphic Metafiction

i. The Transgression of Limits and the Limits of Transgression

A crucial concern of Carter's 'speculative fiction' is the "questioning of the nature of [my] reality as a woman. How that social fiction of [my] 'femininity' was created, by means outside [my] control, and palmed off on [me] as the real thing" (Carter 1983, 70). Nevertheless, many critics accuse Carter for remaining locked within the 'infernal traps of phallogocentric imagination's imagery,' the regressive circulation of patriarchal metaphors and histories, which disable women by framing them within their limiting and distorting (stereotypically objectifying, fetishizing, or idealizing) representations (see Duncker 1986 and

Britzolakis 1997). Carter does indeed often recur to ancient myths, popular cultural icons, or fairy tale topoi of femininity. (Leda with the swan, Sleeping Beauty, and Mae West all appear in *NC* for example.) Yet, she regards her self-ironic rewriting as a feminist tactic of re-vision, coined a "demythologizing business," that she describes by a telling metaphor as "putting new wine in old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottles explode" (Carter 1983, 69, 71). Already this definition discloses the fundamental paradox of the Carterian fiction, and of all metatext. It can only perform a *subversion from within*, and by a transgression reinforce its limits, it has to re-use old bottles for the making of new wine. In other words, it has to weave the very writing, to paraphrase the very representation, to repeat the very fossilized myths, and to invoke the very ideology it aims to resist and subvert.

Carter adopts this logic as early as in her much debated 1979 study entitled *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography,* where she argues that the Marquis de Sade's writing are not so much misogynist texts but more of a "moral pornographer's" ideology-critical manifestos serving the cause of women's liberation by repeating women's sadistic-fetishistic representation brought to the extreme, precisely with the aim to *unveil* that "flesh comes to us out of history" as a cultural construct, determined by social contexts (Carter 1979, 11). In the same year Carter writes a collection of short stories using the same strategy of internal transgression to provide fictional illustrations of the argument outlined in her culture-critical study. In *The Bloody Chamber* she re-writes traditional fairy tales with the aim to reveal them as purveyors of patriarchal ideology dooming women to eternal perfection and passivity.[25] She shows via "writing beyond the ending"[26] that the looking glass defining feminine fairness in a male voice, the glass shoes mutilating female bodies fit for the prince's desires, or the red hood predestining the incorporation by the wolf(man) and the suppression of female bonds and *jouissances* can all be re-cycled for feminist ends, reclaiming the heroines' autonomous sexualities, bodies and identities. It is no wonder, that chronologically the closest novel to these works of demythologization is *PNE*, most explicit in paraphrasing patriarchal myths of femininity, while self-ironically risking to be read as a misogynist, macho narrative. (This 'self-risking' is not due to a lack of skills, but to a purposeful gesture partaking in her relentless project of demythologization-degendering-decomposition that spares no-body, debunks feminism just as much as phallogocentrism, and disintegrates even the narrated/narrating self.) The rest of the trilogy continues along the same lines: it repeats fossilized myths of feminine objectification to break their charm, recalls old stereotypes of womanly silence to gain back her and all Echos' own voice, and resuscitates canonized genres and styles of 'lesser-ladies'-literature' to revitalize them with daring, new meanings.

Carter's transgressive writing is aware of its own limits. It knows that the regulatory system engulfs carnivalesque subversion, that the "carnival must stop," that the ideologically-licensed festive release of tension must always somehow end up in the reconstitution of the affirmed order (see Carter 1991, 220, and 1995, 389, and in Sage 1992, 188). However, in my view, this does not suggest that transgression is impossible, but rather that it is always already included inescapably within the system and the social body whose artificial, hierarchical, violent dichotomies, and communally fixed (op)positions mask its inherently self-deconstructive heterogeneous ambiguity and subversive potentials. From this perspective, Carter's 'argumentation in fictional terms' resembles contemporary theories of transgression and containment, which go beyond Foucault's utter scepticism about the possibilities of effective transgression. (In Foucault's view, it is the prevailing power that both produces and defeats transgression, as the safety-valve effect is an ideologically institutionalized, State-sanctioned mechanism, a technology of containment that serves to contribute to the maintenance of the existing, oppressive order. (see Foucault 1980)) Teresa de Lauretis' *recognition of misrecognition*, Judith Butler's *parodic repetition* (like Jonathan Dollimore's aforementioned *transgressive reinscription*[27]) are some of the key theoretical tenets of contemporary *border-studies*, which my interpretations of Carter's fiction shall rely on.

Judith Butler resembles Carter when she ironically criticizes the ideology of representation as an obstacle to enabling identification, and rethinks alternative domains of cultural intelligibility, subversions of substantive identity, and new possibilities of gender and sexuality contesting the rigid codes of hierarchical binarisms (Butler 1990, 145) from *within* the very terms of power, from within patriarchal practices of representation. For her too, the *replication* of the 'ready-made' ideological (heterosexual) constructs may become a site of the denaturalization and mobilization of the existing identity categories (especially gender). In the Butlerian *gender trouble*, a parodic repetition, a defamiliarizing, spectacularized performance of the 'original' engendered identity becomes a political act that denaturalizes 'regulative fictions,' and reveals the 'original' as a culturally constituted, ideologically-discursively reproduced, repetitive, performative entity, that is always already a "copy of the copy," "a parody of the idea of the natural and the original" (Butler 1990, 30-31). This is a strategy Carter's heroines adopt as they enact their near-histrionically over-played versions of femininity which turn out to be subversions. Through their hyper-feminizing self-stylizations they become women (Fevvers a circus star aerialiste, Eve/lyn a Playboy centerfold-like perfection of femininity, Dora a diva and seductress). But—as all their (usually male) spectators (Walser charmed by Fevvers, Evelyn scared by Mother and herself as Eve,

lovermen perplexed by the Chance sisters) seem to think—they become "too much women," "a femaleness too vast, too gross" (Carter 1982, 66), "the impossible squared" (Carter 1994, 17). Butler's description of "doing gender trouble" is particularly fitting for the Carterian heroine's feminist grotesque corporeal/textual performance: "doing gender [she] repeat[s] and displace[s] though hyperbole, dissonance, internal confusion, and proliferation the very constructs by which [her possibilities of doing gender] are mobilized" (Butler 1990, 31).

During a very similar argumentation, Teresa De Lauretis defines feminism as a *radical rewriting* and *rereading* of the dominant forms of Western culture, "a rewriting which effectively inscribes the presence of a different, and gendered social subject" that is "multiple, rather than divided or unified, and is excessive or heteronomous *vis-à-vis* the ideological state apparati and the sociocultural technology of gender" (De Lauretis 1987, x). Unlike the blindly interpellated Althusserian subject who is completely 'in ideology' while he believes himself to be outside and free of it (Althusser 1998), and unlike the Foucaultian subject who, incapable of subversion, must succumb hopelessly to the technologies of power (Foucault 1980), the De Lauretisian subject is at the same time inside *and* 'beyond' the ideology (of gender and representation) and is conscious of that "twofold pull, of that division, that doubled vision" (De Lauretis 1987, 10). She is aware of the discrepancy between her being simultaneously positioned as *Woman* universally identified with, and represented within essential femininity, homogeneous subjection and ideological containment, and as *a(-)woman* who embodies a singular identity in its plural, uncontrollably heterogeneous, often 'un-feminine' bodily reality that remains invisible, 'ob-scene' to representation. De Lauretis stresses the significance of our *recognition of misrecognition* in the paradoxically feminized subject position that is simultaneously *engendered, desexualized, and masculinized* via disciplining ideological *technologies of gender)* (De Lauretis 1987, 1-30). She invites women to have a "view-from elsewhere," to do critical revision, to gain insight to their alternative, self-deconstruable, heterogeneous selves beyond the defamiliarized icons of femininity. She encourages the recognition of the mis(self)recognition, the realization of the coexistence of *Woman* and *a(-)woman* within oneself, the revelation of the double play of subjection and subversion, so that a "self-subverting coherence" shall be reached. (De Lauretis 1987, 124)

Carter fully accomplishes De Lauretis' project. Her heroines become *Woman*, doomed to identify with stereotypes of ideologically-prescribed Femininity, embodying Virgins, Witches, Whores, Mothers, Pregnant Women, Monsters or Enigmas. Yet, they also challenge these compulsory clichés of *Woman*hood via their singularly self-mocking performances of grotesque *(a)women* distinguished by deviant corporealities. In Carter, the sublime Madonna

is embodied by a farting-belching giantess, the Angel(-in-the-House) is turned into freakish Bird-Woman, the Pregnant Woman is personified by a biological male transvestite fecundated with his own seed, while the Seducing Whore is acted out by septuagenarian, senile hags. Throughout the novel-trilogy, virgins turn out to be nymphomaniacs, witches experts of common household magic, whores intactas, mothers myths, monsters marvels, and enigmas confidence tricksters. The self-freaking Carterian heroine's aim is to invite her readers to re-view their own self-denying social positioning, to inspect their self-evident internalization of images of their gender, to replace their othering logic based on differentiation and domination with the belief in enabling alterity and solidarity. Carter's *transgressive reinscription* (Dollimore 1991, 33) consists of rewriting old cultural narratives, recycling traditional genres, reformulating past representations to shape new identificatory positions, to create innovative spaces (or De Lauretisian *space-offs*[28]) of discourse, to open up alternative perspectives.

ii. Corporeagraphic Metafictions

Patricia Waugh's definition of *metafiction* as "being in the position of examining the old rules in order to discover new possibilities of the game" (Waugh 1984, 42) saliently rhymes with Carter's concept of *demythologization* described as "putting new wine in old bottles" (Carter 1983, 69). According to Waugh, *metafiction* is a self-conscious text that lays bare its own process of artificial construction to suggest the ways in which our sense of reality is similarly fabricated. In her view, *metafiction* exposes the inadequate, obsolescent literary conventions (via parody, play, or framing) in order to convert them into the basis of a constructive social criticism, to perform "a critique of commonly accepted cultural forms of representation from *within* those very modes of representation" (Waugh 1984, 8). In her *Poetics of Postmodernism,* Linda Hutcheon characterizes *historiographic metafiction* by a "theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs," by an ironic dialogue with the past, and a critical reworking of the traditional forms and contents from within, through incorporating yet challenging that which it parodies. (Hutcheon 1988, 5)

Elaborating on Waugh's and Hutcheon's theories of metafiction, I refer to Carter's last novels as *corporeagraphic metafictions*—self-reflexive texts on the *graphing* of the *corpus*—which simultaneously comment on the ideological inscriptions *upon* and the corporeality-generated rewritings *from* the feminized female body, and reflect on the corpus of women's writings canonically deprived of authority due to their authors' being over-identified with uncontrollable female corporeality regarded as central and sole focus of women's texts. They problematize the engendering social practice of the discursive-construction of the individual, ideologically disciplined, feminized subjects' bodies and identities, and of canonized

women's literature's collective textual corpuses. Carter reveals how feminine subject's and women's literature's engendered textual corpuses become canonized, naturalized, normativized, and proposes to 'demythologize' these artificial myths through contrasting them with the gender-bender, genre-bender, self-deconstructive *feminist freak* body's and re-embodied identity's texts. The Carterian *corporeagraphic metafiction* considers the paradoxical space of the body as a sight of semiotic struggle between the text of the ideologically prescribed, engendered, "docile," *feminine* subjectivity *written on the body* by the disciplining, inspecting *technologies of power* (the prevailing patriarchal, post-industrialist, capitalist, consumer society's ideological technologies) (Foucault 1980) *and* its subversive *(re)writing from the body* via the heterogeneous, tempting-threatening, metaphorically "female" or *feminist freak* corporeality's (return to) text (and to the textualized self) via *technologies of the self*.[29] (*Technologies of the self* surface in self-re-stylizing performances and non-self-corrective autobiographies among others (Foucault 1988), which permit individuals to reform(ulate) their bodies in order to provide themselves (and 'others') *jouissance* beyond the frames of conventional (self)representation and meaning-formation.)

Corporeagraphic metafiction plays upon the complex dynamics of *embodiment, disembodiment, re-embodiment* to disclose and subvert the intolerable body discipline of engendering. It denaturalizes the *disembodiment* of the self-sufficient universal masculine subject who celebrates the total triumph of the reason over body. Instead the Carterian disembodiment signifies, the most prominently in *PNE*, a disidentification escaping from the ideologically feminized corporealized subject position, a dismemberment of the culturally prescribed embodiment, and a violent self-decomposition (resembling the body dysmorphic patient's radical body re-management resulting from the false self-image's (mis)recognition).

On the other hand, the femininized subject's biologically essentialized, cultural *embodiment* is destabilized, challenging her being associated with the socially condemned and repressed—sexualized, pathologized, demonized—corporeality that has been depriving her of subjectivity and autonomy. The conventional mind-body dualism is questioned along with its hierarchical projection upon the binary gender oppositions, which are ideologically circumscribed within the dichotomy of the passive, private, corporealized femininity subordinated as its objectified negative 'other' to the active, public, psyche- and reason-governed masculinity. Thus, *corporeagraphic metafiction*'s performing a subversion *from within* the patriarchal system to be subverted so as to establish woman's existence as a positive experience, staying and starting *from within* means the exposure of the masculine

efforts to keep 'her' *outside* (identified with corporeality and deprived of subjectivity), so the relocation of her *inside* as starting point institutes already a form of subversion.[30]

Carter's heroine uses the transgressive potential of woman's antagonistic positioning, by starting out precisely from a culturally pre-scribed, *embodied* (corporealized, contained, objectified) peripheral ~~*feminine subjectivity*~~[31], revealing it through her spectacularly self-ironic performances of freakish *re-embodiments* as a paradoxical grotesquerie. She opts for revisionary feminist grotesquerie instead of blind feminine subjection. She encourages her spectators' recognition of misrecognition through portraying her ideologically constituted body as idealized *and* normativized, essentialized aestheticized *and* pathologized abjectified, eroticized *and* asceticized, corporealized *and* desexualized, spectacularized *and* obscured, objectified-feminized *and* subject(ifi)ed-masculinized entities. The subversive *re-embodiment* of the Carterian re-vision keeps the body as a ground of identity, but turns it into a transgender, metamorphosing, freakish grotesque body that self-reflexively presents itself as "homely" (see Smith 1994, 267) to 'me,' to the 'other' and to the 'other within me.' This re-embodiment gains empowerment by challenging over-representation and invisibility, defying ideological-discursive constitution and conventional readability, and resisting cultural embodiment and the body politic that generates and disciplines socially inscribed, ideologically containable bodies to provide reassuring, illusorily homogenous (mis)identificatory positions. The ultimate aim is to trace a non-dualist, non-reductionist, non-exclusionary (as well as non-universalist, non-essentialist, non-biologist) conception of the subject conceived as a self-consciously *re-embodied* being, a corporeal *and* empowered entity, unashamedly aware and reflexive of its heterogeneous materiality. (Although I argue that the *re-writings from the body*, the *re-embodiments* of the somatized *body-text* have the capacity to subvert the ideological inscriptions on the semioticized body, I agree with Elizabeth Grosz that there is no such thing as a 'real' material body independent of representations and cultural engravings, since sexed, engendered, raced, classed, aged bodies are constituted as "mobile and changeable terms of cultural production" (Grosz 1994, xi). Nevertheless, I believe that bodies also have a *counter-productivity*, so that they "function interactively and productively, they act and react, they generate what is new, surprising, unpredictable" (Grosz 1994, xi), and even if they cannot erase social inscriptions, they can re-inscribe, transform them, in different, alternative terms.)

Corporeagraphic metafiction reflects both on *body politic*[32] (revealing how the repressive *and* stimulative power machines 'work on' bodies, how they become invested with corporealities via ideological technologies of *biopower*, institutions of state apparatuses,

forms of knowledge, discourses circulated, truths produced with the aim to involve power in people's lives and physical existences (see Foucault 1980, 57)) and on the *politics of the body* (unveiling how the self-freaking of the feminized body, the self-(de)constructing grotesque corporeality disturbs normative categories of unified, dichotomized bodies, opening up a subversive "space of contradiction, drift, homelessness, a gap through which a complex heterogeneity destabilizes our sense of any stable identification" (Smith 1994, 267)).

The chart below demonstrates how woman's "identification with and against her body" (Smith 1994, 272) (un)structures the Carterian text: it shows how *corporeagraphic metafiction* self-reflexively and self-ironically comments upon the ideologically disciplining *body politic* simultaneous with the subversive *politics of the body*, upon the De Lauretisian *Woman(hood)* intertwined with *a(-)women(ness)*, upon the body produced by the Foucauldian *technologies of power* coiinciding with the body performing via *technologies of the self*, upon the culturally pre-scribed *writing on the body* palimpsestic with revisionary, revolutionary *(re)writing from the body*, upon feminizing *cultural embodiment* or masculinizing *disembodiment* coexistent with feminist *grotesque re-embodiments* or *freakish self-decompositions*. The table displays how the corporeagraphic metafictional semioticization of the body designed to unweave the ideological bodily inscriptions and symbolic representation is always intertwined with the w(e)aving of a translinguistic, heterogeneous corporeality-induced, somatized *body-text* (de)composing the whole work. Therefore, the prescribed and rewritten embodiments, the bodily surfaces and the corporeal depths, the bodies of narrators, narrated selves, narratees, of womenwriters and readers, and the body of the text, the somatized textual corpus "merge in skins and skeins of meaning" (Smith 1984, x).

Corporeagraphic metafiction		SEMIOTICIZATION OF THE BODY
ideological body politic	Subversive politics of the body	
pre-scriptive writing on the body	counter-productive (re)writing from the body	
Woman	a(-)woman	
body produced/repressed by technologies of power	body performing/self-stylizing via technologies of self	
cultural embodiment	grotesque re-embodiment freakish self-decomposition	
femini(mi)zed body	feminist, freak body	
Body-text ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ SOMATIZATION OF THE TEXT ↑		↑ ↑

In *corporeagraphic metafiction* the body—instead of being considered as a neutral, natural, non-mediated entity—is regarded as a palimpsestic space of polyphonic, antagonistic

texts pre/re-written on/from cultural/material bodies. The body (de)formed by normalizing phallogocentric power machines is both *in* ideology, seemingly repeating the same old, gendered, patriarchal representations of women, and/yet *beyond* ideology, due to the rebellious feminist political strategy of re-visionary rewriting, of 'repetition with a difference' and a resisting quality, offering a demythologizing, critical metatext on society with the aim to reclaim autonomous and alternative bodies, identities, voices and narratives of her own.

Carter's internally subversive *corporeagraphic metafictional* trilogy nicely illustrates 'metafiction's maturing' throughout its literary historical development described by Waugh. "The paranoia permeating the metafictional writing of the sixties and seventies" (infiltrating 1977's *PNE*) slowly gives way "to celebration, to the discovery of new forms of the fantastic, fabulatory extravaganzas, magic realism" (of which *NC* is a wonderful example), and to the realization that "a moment of crisis can also be seen as a moment of recognition," and the recognition that the deconstruction of narrative-structures offers an accurate model for understanding the contemporary experience of the world as a web of interdependent semiotic systems (Waugh 1984, 9), and comprehending the self as partly artificial, partly discursive, but also partly corporeal construct (a 'mature' metafictional stance realized in *WC*).

iii. Trans-gender Narratives from/on the Silly Lady Novelist's and the Histrionic Hysteric's Bodies

In the complex Carterian corpus, the semioticization of bodies accompanied by the somatization of texts, and the spectacular corporeal performances coinciding with tricky narrative acts, are complemented by the *corporeagraphic metafictional* reconsideration of the ideologically engendered bodies intertwined with the rewriting of the literary genres and styles canonically identified as feminine, thus 'lesser' writings. Carter positions herself and her narrator-heroines within a re-evaluated 'feminine literary tradition' with the aim to question its institutionalized marginalization (by 'truth-producing' phallogocentric discursive technologies of power, canon-shaping patriarchal literary institutions, and ideologically-governed, inherited interpretive strategies) as a less serious or a less valuable corpus of writings, destined for a 'lay' female audience (gourmand consumers instead of gourmet professionals), or a politics-oriented elite of fanatist feminist readers devoid of 'real' literary taste.

Carter's narrator-heroines ironically re-enact the roles of the two patriarchally iconicized authoress figures through exaggeratedly repeating the stereotypically feminized discourses associated with them. They challenge their readers by rehearsing theatricalized the sentimentally kitsch, expressively confessional, sloppy effusiveness of the authoress coined by George Eliot 'silly lady novelist' (see Eliot 1985, 518), and by histrionically restaging the incomprehensible splattering

or hysteric delusions of the 'madwoman-writer.' On the one hand, they emphatically and mockingly remain within the classic feminine romance and sentimental love story frame, through repeating (with a twist) the gender hierarchy, the idealization, the moralizing, the hyper-emotionality, and primarily the stereotypically 'silly feminine,' affected, banal, hyperbolic style of the "Pamela plot" (Gilbert-Gubar 1979, 69). On the other hand, the over-writing, the excessive, catachretic, stylistically antagonistic, periodic overflowing sentences infecting the narratives mime the convulsions of the hysteric body in a text moved by acrobatic somersaults, grotesque contortions and spasmodic fits of laughter (mockingly outmaneuvering the symbolic order). Moreover, Carter and her heroines reveal that the patriarchally-canonically feminized literary text is systematically marked by the body—labelled as major theme and stylistic-organizer, as engine and limit of the 'womanly text' and primary determining factor of its authoress—to guarantee the silencing and invalidation of the silly or mad (ie. 'unreadable') womanwriter. Yet, rejecting the conventional incompatibility of femininity (synonymous with corporeality) and authorship (synonymous with authority and subjectivity), they mockingly make precisely the silly lady novelist's 'feminimized,' infantilized and the madwoman-writer's hystericized, sexualized bodies the very engines of the feminist re-writing, apt to destabilize limiting (concepts of) patriarchal representation, phallogocentric language and masculinized subject position alike. (They refuse the patriarchal Name of the Author to sign their texts with their pathologized female corporealities: Eve/lyn's bulimic, Fevvers' infantile and hysteric, Dora's nymphomaniac bodies constitute leitmotifs and structural-stylistic organizers of the narratives.)

Thus, Carter and her (mock)autobiographer-narrator-heroines embody the womanwriter situated within a tradition of nineteenth century literary foremothers labelled silly, sentimental amateurs, un(self)recognized talents secretively shying away under male pseudonyms (of Anne Radcliffe's or the Bronte Sisters' type), and of modernist female artist predecessors regarded as delusionally over-poeticized, instinctively irrational, degenerate or frustrated hysterics (of Virginia Woolf's or Gertrude Stein's type). They self-consciously speak up from a position located within a culture where literary preferences are (pre)determined by patriarchal canon formation, and look for possibilities of subversion *from within* the ideologically feminized-marginalized literature.

Yet clichés of feminine language are 'repeated with a difference,' *staged* in a spectacular performance with self-ironic metatextual comments. The polyphonic womanwriter performs her revision from a *bifocal perspective*: she stands within a tradition while subverting it, with the double purpose to reclaim the merits, to pay homage to neglected, devalued literary foremothers, *and* to demythologize, to rewrite the limiting, unescapable category of 'feminine literature.' Via a playfully borderline, *both* silly and self-ironic, *both* shattered hysteric and self-consciously organized

histrionic discourse she denaturalizes 'feminine literature' as ideologically engendered, biologically determined, universalized concept (and questions *écriture féminine* and *phallogocentric language* as exclusive categories). *WC* provides a perfect example for this, as the twin heroines', Dora and Nora Chance's names are explicit references to Freud's Dora and Ibsen's Nora, two prominent patriarchal versions of the madwoman and the silly doll, who here co-author a subversively polyphonic text which undermines both stereotypical authoress-positions, blurs the difference between the two contradictory modes of feminized discourse (and their mocked masculinized counterpart). (Carter's defamiliarization of gendered discourses peaks in her *trans-gender narratives* playing with *verbal drag*. In *PNE*, Evelyn's and Eve's ineradicably masculine and over-effeminate voices interrupt and complement, castrate and abort each other during a sexual/textual de-composition. In *NC* opposedly gendered discourses embrace as reporter Jack Walser's objectivity-oriented, masculine report is 'infected' by the interviewed Fevvers' emotional hyperfeminine style, that turns him into a sentimental clown who writes with "flying fingers" (Carter 1994, 97) miming the beloved birdwoman's (narrative) flight. *WC*'s Dora seduces narcissistic men by making use of the writing skills and literary historical knowledge learnt from them, yet her narrative voice gains its real energy from her arch-seductress grandmothers showing her the way to becoming a '*femme vitale* writer.')

Carter's 'discursive recycling' recalls contemporary French feminist theoreticians' strategy of stylistic-linguistic-representational 'subversion from within' fuelled by the body. Carter is like Hélène Cixous who steals words and makes them fly, writing from an endless body without end (Cixous 1981), like Luce Irigaray who parodically reiterates conventional masculine discourse, exposing the narcissism of *hom(m)osexuality*, undoing the phallocratic *logic of the same* via repeating, interpreting and exceeding it in a differing, bodily-drive motivated, sensual, libidinal, fluid woman's writing (Irigaray 1991, 1993,), or like Julia Kristeva who reintroduces or reveals the corporeally motivated *genotext* within the *phenotext*, the maternal Semiotic within the paternal Symbolic register (Kristeva 1984, 1985). Nevertheless, for me, Carter is fascinating because instead of praising a (re)gendered, 'women-only-writing' resembling limiting misreadings[33] of Cixous' *écriture feminine*, Irigaray's *parole femme*, or Kristeva's maternal *Chora*, she goes one step further by providing an ironic metatext on her own subversive attempts from within the system to be subverted. Thus, Carter problematizes the radical disparity of conventional- versus poetic style, of contained- versus transgressive language, of *patrius sermo* (father speech) versus *maternal lingua* (mother tongue) (Gilbert-Gubar 1989, 91), arguing for the potentially trans-gender ('re/de/trans-gender-able'), self-queering, self-deconstructive quality of all texts.

Beyond its *trans-gender* quality, the Carterian *corporeagraphic metafiction* is characterized by a *trans-generic* property, I have referred to earlier. Reworking several genres

conventionally canonized as 'feminine' leads to overturning them in an ironic and feminist hybrid collage. Carter's texts are *Bildungsromans* which instead of a teleological personality-development narrate playful or dramatical self-decompositions of identity, *Künstlerromans* which are authored from their very beginnings by their verbally talented and tricky self-writing heroines, sentimental love stories without the compulsory happy endings of the patriarchal, hierarchical, heteronormative, reproductive 'family romance', fairy tales with adult conclusions, autobiographical journals or reminiscences melting private and public, fiction and truth(s), history and her stories, narratives of the self and others. The patchwork effect of the narrative is reinforced by the polyphonic writing interweaving regardless of gender so different linguistic styles and registers as spontaneous, oral, familiar discourse, and carefully composed, elite, academic style, as indecent expressions, oaths, carnivalesque profanities, and highbrow, affected, over-stylized language, as Cockney slang and Latin *terminus technicus*, as excessively gossipy, loquacious over-writing and stubborn silencing of the essence in narrative gaps. These twisted cords of varied voices complicate further the web intertwining in a disentangable way stereotypically silly or hysteric, feminine, mockingly masculine, or self-reflexive feminist narrative-threads.

iv. Re-vamping Writing by Women: Bifocal Vision, (Self)ironic Re-vision, Sisterly Burlesque

This multivocal ambiguity of the Carterian (re)writings allows for their being simultaneously interpreted as convention-bounded feminine, or even patriarchally contained 'male impersonating,' or on the contrary, as materialist- or utopian-feminist texts, depending on the co-authoring reader's realization or rejection of the ironic metatext. I would not call any of these interpretations misreadings, interpretive failures or less valuable readerly experiences. I refuse the patriarchal domineering, binary logic's hierarchization between good and bad, elite and laic, feminine and feminist readings, and I rather prefer to distinguish between *myopic and bifocal readerly points of view*, and introduce *bifocal vision* as an adequate expression describing the complex experience of *corporeagraphic metafiction.*

Inspired by Susan Rubin Suleiman's concept of bifocality in her study of the reception of contemporary art (Suleiman 1994, 147), I call *bifocal vision* a parallel perception of the womanwriter's being located within a 'restful', 'feminine' literary tradition of the canonically marginalized-feminized (m)other-texts by "silly lady novelists" (Eliot 1985, 518) or 'madwomenwriters,' *and* (a recognition) of its 'restless,' ironic, feminist metatext upon this limiting ideological positioning of herself among her literary foremothers. It signifies a simultaneous reading of the ideologically determined, feminized literature's voice and of the

self-conscious, daring other voices, playful, political rewritings. Whereas *myopic reading* recognizes only the first components of these contradictory-complementary pairs, *bifocal vision* also perceives the 'difference' in the deconstructive, feminist, mocking repetition of the feminine voice. However, it is noteworthy that before becoming a reader performing a *bifocal (re)vision*, one is always already a *myopic reader*. One must pass through the stage of the mandatory ideologically interpellating engendered (feminine) reading in order to provide a subversive (feminist) reading (that will inherently incorporate the feminine reading).

The antagonistic, re-visionary feminist-feminine *bifocal perspective* reflects the paradox of metafiction: it has to invoke the very view and readerly- or authorial-positions it aims to subvert. (It retells a narrative according to the traditional codes of *always already engendered* (Butler 1990) 'feminine' meaning formation and text production, remaining within the frames of stereotypical representations of femininity and stereotypically feminine representations).

The text inviting a *bifocal reading* encourages its readers to re-enact the Carterian grotesque heroines' confidence trickster (identity-)performance based on a play of 'now you see me, now you don't' through realizing the *trompe l'oeil* effect of the narrative that clicks back and forth between feminine and freak, feminine and feminist text, and, thus, enhances simultaneously identification and self-reflection, both (mis)recognition and recognition of misrecognition leading to reconstructions. The text's addresses its ideal reader as a reader occupying a *myopic* (limited/feminine) position that is contained and expanded by the *bifocal* re-visionary (liberatory/feminist) position. Thus, it re-invokes the recurring Carterian corporeal/textual performance parallel, since this double view recalls how the grotesque heroines "revamp their spectacularity" (see Russo 1995, 159-183), how they willingly expose their bodies to the objectifying male gaze as over-spectacularized pseudo-fetishes with the aim to challenge invisibility, to seducingly trouble, re-vamp conventional representations, and to exploit their "to-be-looked-at-ness," their feminine looks for the purposes of re-visionary feminist self-stylization, offering the pleasures of alternative, positive identificatory positions for female spectators.

The bifocal vision exceeds the naïve, limited comfort of myopic contemplation, as well as the authoritative, pseudo-objective, exclusionary 'God's Eye-view' of the male gaze, and instead recalls crucial ocular metaphors of contemporary feminist thought. Adrienne Rich's *re-vision* marks "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering the old text from a new critical direction" (Rich 1985, 2045). Teresa de Lauretis' *view from elsewhere* signifies in a *space-off* "a movement from the space represented by/in a representation, by/in a discourse, by/in a sex-gender system, to the space not represented yet [implied] unseen in

them," a feminist effort to create new spaces of discourse, to rewrite cultural narratives, and to define the terms of another perspective (De Lauretis 1987, 25-26). Donna Haraway's reclaimed *partial perspective* and specifically *embodied visions* defy the male gaze's unmarked position and transcendental objectivity to initiate a 'feminist objectivity' based on limited location, situated knowledge, multiple ways of seeing, and "a loving care people might take to learn how to see faithfully from another's point of view" (Haraway 1991, xx).

Carter elaborates on this ocular metaphor suggesting that her narratives and their narrator-heroines are *winking accomplice-like* both at their past literary foremothers and at their present and future readers, assuming they are all involved in the communal solidarity-work of (re)weaving sister-texts, of 're-membering' a female tradition's literary corpuses. In Carter writing by women have nothing to do with the *anxiety of influence*, Harold Bloom's (rather sexist) metaphor of literary paternity, defined as an Oedipal murderous jealousy of the male poet writing against the paternal authority of the masculine canon's great literary forefathers who must be overcome, invalidated for his becoming a true poet. But neither do they suffer from Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *anxiety of authorship*, this vertiginous phantom-limb sensation felt over the gap left by the absent body of women's literature omitted from the canon, this claustrophobia on being imprisoned as silenced Muse in male authored texts, this fear that she cannot create and cannot become a precursor herself. They do not wage the traumatic battle for self-definition of the womanwriter tormented by a matrilinear anxiety of missing literary foremothers, nor do they feel the drastic "dread of suicidal tarantella of female creativity" (Gilbert-Gubar 1979).

On the contrary, the Carterian narrator-heroines write freely and eloquently. They are 'natural-born womanwriters' who self-ironically even turn their anxieties into textual engines (for New Eve/lyn decomposition is a form of composition, for Dora tragedies inspire comedies, Fevvers' broken wing gives a new turn to her 'narrative flight'). Most significantly their relationship to literary foremothers is marked by a self-assured loving. They perform a subversive repetition of the feminized literary tradition with a teasing self-irony, a tender irony, a knowing, metatextual, sisterly burlesque laughter shared with the mimed womenwriters in a comic text that is also an intertextual *hommage* to the pioneers of women's literature bound by patriarchal limits. Democratic solidarity and carnivalesque mockery are fused as fundamental components of a primarily playful text aiming to incite a shared pleasure, a common wisdom, and a mutual healing.

The Carterian women's subversively ventriloquist or polyphonic voices speak up in hidden narratives with 'forked and freaked female tongues' to destabilize the gender- and

genre-shaping dominant hegemonic discourse, while mingling tenderly teasing (self)irony and sisterly solidarity, and allowing for the narrative of the self to coincide with the narrative of 'the other.' The final aim of 'speaking in quotation marks' (rehearsing social fictions of femininity in order to *reveal* them as inevitable yet unacceptable, to *unveil* and question the conventional incompatibility of femininity and subjectivity (or authorship)) is to prove via confidence-trickster textual-, corporeal performances that besides ideologically prescribed silence, (see Gilbert-Gubar 1979, Séllei 1999) superficiality, stereotypes and incomprehensibility, there are other wor(l)ds available for daring women writers and readers alike.

v. The Book and the Body

Carter's *corporeagraphic metafictions* are characterized by a simultaneous exposition of body, identity and text as *artifacts* contained, limited and produced by a *language* infiltrated by ideology, social conventions and culture-determined representative practices. These artifacts can nevertheless be spectacularly reconstructed through *self-reflexive performances*, (of) self-fictionalizing identities, self-re-membering bodies and self-revisionary texts, and through the subversive practice of *fiction*. Thus, fictional wor(l)ds may contribute to social change in the 'real' world by laying open its illusory nature and opening up new perspectives on life and fiction, self and other, naturalized norm and self-deconstructing freak.

The last Carterian trilogy's texts explicitly stress their metafictional quality through identifying the narrator-heroine's grotesque body with the book being written on/by it. When, after her performance, Fevvers "kisses her free hand to all [and she] folds up her quivering wings with a number of shivers, moues and grimaces as if she were putting away a naughty book" (Carter 1998, 18) the narrative voice clearly equates corporeal- and textual performance and "quivering," "naughty" freaking, while the self-mocking self-reflection of the grimacing womanwriter is also exposed. At the end of her 'passion of becoming woman,' Eve/lyn concludes: "The rocks between which I am pressed as between pages of a gigantic book seem to be composed of silence: I am pressed between the leaves of a book of silence. This book has been emphatically closed." (Carter 1994, 180) Thus, she displays the womanwriter's disillusion upon how iconic representations of femininity associated with ruthlessly deformed bodies silence all attempts at female agency. During Dora Chance's autobiographical storytelling, the Book's disintegration into loose, confused notes, wrinkled newspaper scraps coincides with the mis-re-membering of the body, and the recognition that despite the soothing touch, the loving connection with the writing foremothers, the compensatory words will not save from being wasted away by death. As Dora says, leafing through Grandma's scrapbook containing all their photos: "Piles of scrapbooks, cuttings

turned by time to the colour of the freckles on the back of an old lady's hand. Her hand. My hand, as it is now. When you touch the old newsprint, it turns into brown dust, like the dust of bones." (Carter 1993, 78) Her lines illustrate the functioning of Carter's feminist metafiction. Besides a postmodernist disillusion resulting from the recognition of the omnipresence of illusion, besides an ironic and witty self-reflexiveness, it is also characterized by a sisterly solidarity, a caring connection between members of the same literary heritage. The line evokes M.C.Escher's 1948 drawing entitled *Drawing Hands*[34] (portraying a hand drawing a drawing hand, a mirror-image of itself), but the Carterian hands seem to be lovingly holding of hands, sometimes teasingly tickling each other, despite all disillusions.

The narrator-heroines self-mockingly undertake the double Danaidian project of giving 'true' autobiographical accounts of their masquerading, metamorphosing, re-embodying 'authentic' selves. They provide—via their *corporeagraphic metafictions* inviting a *revisionary bifocal reading*—a metatext on their own *episteme* to be subverted from within, yet they self-ironically highlight that the metatext produced shall be no more than another piece of fiction. This recalls Patricia Waugh's definition of metafiction as a tendency or function inherent in all novels, resulting in a writing which consistently displays its conventionality, lays bare its conditions of artifice, and thereby explores the problematic relationship between life and fiction (Waugh 1984, 4-5). This is an issue that is thoroughly problematized via the autobiografictional aspect of Carter's writing, to which I shall turn now.

4. Autobiografiction: Re-membering the Body, and the (Re-)embodied Identity

A vital reason why Carter's last novels can be read as a trilogy is that all of their heroines are first person singular voiced narrators recollecting the stories of their lives in theatricalized autobiographical situations to produce self-reflexive metatexts on the freakish, re-embodied, re-engendered identities performed by them.

In *PNE* Eve/lyn recollects in retrospective reminiscences the trials and tribulations of the picaresque passion succeeding to his/her forced sex-change operation executed by militant feminists turning him from misogynous macho to the emblem of Femininity, the New Woman of Antithesis. (The occasionally recurring third-person singular reference to the self can be considered as a self-alienating rhetorical strategy of the suffering narrator or as the post-operative traumatic symptom of a transsexual struggling with his/her multiply gendered identity.) In the first part of *NC*, Fevvers narrates in an exclusive interview given in her dressing room to the charmed journalist Walser all the adventures she went through on her 'advancement' from Ma Nelson's brothel to Madame Schreck's Museum of Woman Monsters

and to Colonel Kearney's circus, while she invented herself as a world-famous BirdWoman, a giantess winged aerialiste. (In the remaining two parts of the novel Fevvers' lifewriting continues as a third person singular narrative, partly written down by the more and more feverish journalist Walser, and partly recounted from a joyous small child's perspective—designating herself in the third person singular—by the infantile Fevvers herself.) Finally, in *WC* Dora Chance embodies the mature Carterian autobiographer who, in a sustained autobiographical voice (with only two, almost imperceptible but quite telling, intrusions of other voices, that of her sister and of her grandmothers) pens down on her 75th birthday one and a half century of family saga, theatre history, fashion chronicle, and manual of seduction, recalling the most memorable moments of her career as a 'twinned' dance-hall-girl. Therefore, the novels could be easily labelled fictional autobiographies.

These novels, taking the form an exclusive interview, a confessional reminiscence or a recapitulative birthday balance, all arouse the curiosity of both intra-textual, implied, and extra-textual, 'real' readers, perplexing them with the plot-organizing crucial question of their narratives which coincides with the key problematic issue of the genre of autobiography: "Who is it really who says 'I'?" Several factors contribute to the problematization of the narrating/narrated 'I''s identity. (1) The transgressive, freakish body—the trademark Carterian pretext and engine of the text—constitutes not only the opposite of the classic, controlled body, but also the negative other side of the Platonian mind/body dichotomy, and as such, an unspeakable and undecodable 'leftover' of traditional autobiographical representation. (2) The narrator constructs her identity as a spectacular role, a tricky performance—in unison with the novels' enchanting spaces, Hollywood movie, the circus, or the 'low theatre' of show-biz—with the aim to keep the spectators in constant uncertainty. We never learn whether the post-operative Eve/lyn is really a man or a woman deep inside, whether Fevvers is a bird or a woman, a sublime wonder or a deformed monster, an untouchable virgin or a man-eater nymphomaniac, whether Dora is the Eternal Arch-Seductress or just a senile, old crone. This 'neither-no' game of 'appearance-disappearance' nicely stages how the female autobiographer mock-exhibitionistly displays her re-embodied self as if ready to be objectified to the voyeuristic gaze of the receivers, while her reconstructed identity's ob-scene, trans-discursive, text-disruptive corporeality) inherently induces the potential of mis-interpretation, and thus, resists simplifying objectification. (3) The Carterian self-writings are characterised by a consistent effort to deny all the defining elements of the classical category of autobiography. Despite the genre's being invoked by the narrator-protagonists' emphatic autobiographical situations, the texts absolutely refuse

retrospection, mono-vocal prose, teleology, the universal masculine subjection position, and most importantly, the truth-telling of the lejeunian *autobiographical pact*.

In Philippe LeJeune's sense of the term, autobiography, conforming to the *autobiographical pact*, is a true, authentic, reliable, retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence focusing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality (Lejeune 2003, 18, see Anderson 2001, 2 and Stanley 1992, 60). In the Carterian novelistic reminiscences, however, retrospection is troubled by the trademark magical realist play with time, chronological shifts, parallel time zones, castrated Grandfather Clocks and a mocked or murdered Father Time. The limits of the prose narrative are challenged by the hybrid writing style, fusing various genres, melting intertexts and combining antagonistic voices (such as Eve/lyn's hyper-masculine and over-effeminate, Fevvers' naively feminine and militant feminist, or Dora's sentimentally sincere and self-reflexively ironic voices). The androcentric autobiographical tradition's universally masculine subject, this meritable Great Man (ie. Male) is replaced by a fallible, singularly irregular female narrator. His account of his personality-development or his confession-like self-examination aiming at self-correction and a re-established cohesion (Séllei 2001, 13, Smith 1993, 1-10, Stanley 1992, 4, Swindells 1995, 2) are 'degraded to' her individual (life)story motivated by her deviant body that fails (or refuses) to organize the 'I' into a traditionally meaningful, reasonable, correct(ed) whole. The text-organising role of Spirit and Reason are substituted by the feminized, freakish, unauthoritative Body that subverts conventional categories of gender, identity and *his*tory, and destabilises the subject/object/abject division, the normality/abnormality dichotomy, or the speakable/unspeakable differentiation alike. The teleological development of the (traditionally masculine) autobiographical personality never takes place. Here, the female narrator's life-writing is either characterised by an unchanging identity-theme marking the text (as the Eternal Seductress' identity in *WC*), or a disseminating, heterogeneous I whose transformations elicit merely the formation of an ideal reader designed for her (as in *NC*, where journalist Walser's interpretive strategies improve so that he does not wish to solve, hence to close Fevvers' performance, but merely to enjoy it), or at most, and perhaps most ironically, this 'development' of the autobiographical subject signals a shift from man to woman (as in *PNE* narrating Eve/lyn's sex-change).

Moreover, most importantly, the most vital prerequisite of autobiographical writing, truth-telling is neglected, as the genre is reinvented via what I call *autobiografiction*, a text where the sincere representation of the authentic self is turned into the intentional fictionalization of identity.[35] The truthful life-writing transforms into an intense self-

distortion, a self-deconstructing re-writing of life, a freaking of the self, an unreliable and ironic narrator's fibbing, forgetful, flirtatious narrative of the self proclaiming itself a product of fantasy, illusion or caprice. The trustworthy real person (the author on the cover page identical with the narrator and the protagonist) is substituted by a fictional character fond of tall tales, teasing and gossip. In full contrast to the LeJeunian *autobiographical pact*,[36] The Carterian heroines' *autobiografictions* build their narratives precisely on the fictionalization of the self, on ambiguity, on riddles, on flirtatiousness, on charming and cleverness. Life-writing turns into a kaleidoscopic game-scene of debating, metamorphic identity-versions.

In her 'autographomaniac' narrative, the Carterian heroine tells everything and even too much about herself in an obsessive, irrepressible self-reflexive, self-oververbalizing prattle. Yet, she reserves the right to inventively imagine, to misremember, to distort memories by nostalgia, emotions and subjectivity, to 'lose the essence' or 'waste the truth' in her free flow of small talk. Throughout her narrative Fevvers consequently constructs both her identity and body as "confidence trick" (Carter 1994, 8), so that, in the end, she announces the triumph of her clever verbal- and corporeal swindle by laughing full in the face of the fatally charmed reporter who failed to disclose her 'real' self.

> The spiralling tornado of Fevvers' laughter began to twist and shudder across the entire globe, as if a spontaneous response to the giant comedy that endlessly unfolded beneath it, until everything that lived and breathed, everywhere, was laughing. Or so it seemed to the deceived husband, who found himself laughing too, even if he was not quite sure whether or not he might be the butt of the joke. Fevvers, sputtering to a stop at last, crouched above him, covering his face with kisses....'To think I really fooled you!' she marvelled. (Carter 1994, 295)

In *PNE* antagonistically gendered voices ventriloqously disrupt each other, either when Evelyn's 'original' hyper-masculine voice gives his macho comments on her own painful womanly adventures (after the sex-change operation the hero/ine sees herself with his own old eyes as a stirring Playboy centrefold, and comments her own rape disinterested with the words "Poor Eve! She's being screwed again!" (Carter 1982, 91)), or when New Eve(lyn)'s 'newly gained' over-effeminate identity's female voice destabilizes the misogynist narrative via a cutting (self)irony (at his own surgical castration he thinks to himself: "Oh, the dreadful symbolism of that knife! To be castrated with a phallic symbol!" (Carter 1982, 70)). Eve/lyn constantly questions her/his status as reliable autobiographer, claiming: "Even my memories no longer fitted me, they were old clothes belonging to somebody else no longer living" (Carter 1982, 92). The most explicit commentaries[37] on the unreliable narrator's

autobiographical strategies reinforcing readerly doubts occur in Dora Chance's reminiscences coupled with asides 'winking at' her audience eager to learn her family secrets.

> Perry told us of course, because we were family, but I don't propose to tell you, not now...Hard to swallow, huh? Well, you might have known what you were about to let yourself in when you let Dora Chance in her ratty old fur and poster paint, her orange (Persian Melon) toenails sticking out of her snakeskin peep-toes, reeking of liquor, accost you in the Coach and Horses and let her tell you a tale. I've got a tale and half to tell, all right!" (Carter 1991, 227)

The storytellers posit themselves as unreliable narrators—Eve/lyn as a trans-sexual forced into a foreign body and an irremovable, interminable role, Fevvers as a professional illusionist, Dora as a senile, drunkard "batty old hag" (Carter 1991, 5)—who all wilfully play with the polysemy generated by their ironic tone, who identify memory with misremembering (forgetting, fictionalizing and fibbing), and methodically suggest that the portrait traced here is not a 'real' portrait, or not 'really' her at all.

Therefore, *autobiografiction*, on the one hand, illustrates the postmodern concept of identity as a narrative construct of an individual and improvised *yet* culturally controlled and repeatable (hence rewrite-able) performance. On the other hand, *autobiografiction* attests the poststructuralist conception of language, as it suggests the insufficiency of our 'narratives of the self' by regarding *representation* an unreliable means of mediating our *experiences* which already constitute subjective filters to a *reality* that must remain ungraspable, inaccessible. Since the inherently inadequate representation shall only generate misinterpretations (resulting from misrepresentations), the 'real, true self' is only accessible as an 'other,' an image, or an imaginary construct.

In my opinion, knowing that the surface will reflect the object submerged into the water in a distorted way, the Carterian autobiografiction opts for plunging distorted objects into the depth in order to gain a clear image at the surface.[38] Only a grotesque subject's 'self-freakings' (deliberate self-distortions of the self-decomposing narrative and of the re-deformed narrated/narrating self) may mirror the dynamic metamorphosis of a heterogeneous *subject-*, and the disseminating *meaning in process* (Kristeva 1985a, 216).

The Carterian heroines' self-fictionalizing reminiscences underline Paul de Man's argument, suggesting that all attempts at auto-portraiture are *de-facements*, which highlight the very impossibility of the autobiographical genre and illuminate the autobiographical nature of all fiction. In the De Manian logic "autobiography is not a genre or a mode, but a figure of reading or of understanding that occurs, to some degree, in all texts" (De Man 1979,

4). Yet, while De Man thinks that the autobiographer on reading/writing himself in the text and seeing only a face called into being by the substitutive trope of *prosopopoeia*, (literally the giving of a face or personification), and on realizing that self-knowledge and self-representation is limited by figurative language and fiction, and on being faced with the impossibility of autobiography, tries all to 'mask' or conceal his own fictionalization, displacement and disfigurement, the Carterian fictional autobiographers ironically display, highlight, spectacularly stage their over-acted self-fictionalization. While the De Manian autobiographer seems for me to be (justly) frustrated by his own limits, and disillusioned on being (de-)faced with the impossibility of pinning down his intratextual self and with the incapacity of his extratextual self's aspired authority, the Carterian autobiografictionalizers cheerfully and teasingly invite readers to share their pleasures resulting from their over-played self-masking de-/re-facements.

In the reminiscences of the admittedly unreliable, (self)ironic narrators the self features as fiction. A *trompe-l'oeil-identity* is rehearsed that inherently performs its own parody as well. The unusual settings of the novels—the operating theatre, the fairground, the music-hall: popular entertainment industries' scenes and almost 'utopian' landscapes—nearly 'prescribe' theatricalized, histrionic or mock versions of identity. The heroines' distinctive bodily traits, Eve/lyn's feminine drag surgically crafted on his body by the mad scientist Mother, Fevvers' wings constituting the basis of her confidence trick, the Chance sisters' identical make-up constituting the foundation of their well-marketed showbiz image, are all presented and (mis)interpreted as essential markers of their identities, yet turn out to be illusions, artifices. These fake identity-markers are simultaneously denaturalized as forgeries and ironically pretended to be irremovable tokens of the individual's body and personality. Fevvers mockingly suggests that her wings are artificial prosthesis planned for her performance, but she never removes them. The Chance sisters never appear on their own or without their make-up, thus, never get rid of their self-stylized image of Siamese seductresses. Eve/lyn fatalistically accepts his forced sex-change and, despite his unchangeable masculine mind and his incapacity of becoming a real woman, never considers the possibility of re-transforming herself into a man. Thus, the Carterian heroines' *trompe-l'oeil-identities* forecast Judith Butler's *gender trouble* (Butler 1990) by self-reflexively calling attention to the performative and constructed nature of their identities which may, via a self-reflexive, repetition with a *différance*, stage their own parodies too. In Carter's trilogy, this spectacular, self-ironic, self-deconstructing performativity is a characteristic of identity, femininity, textuality and corporeality alike (--all enacted in the fashion of the BirdWoman's famed 'confidence-trick').

(It is all the more worthwhile to investigate how the heroines' differing bodies serving as markers of their identities also label their narratives of the self, how corporeality infiltrates the narrative style, precisely because the reminiscences consist of tall-tales invented by self-consciously ironic and unreliable narrators. Thus, it is not so much their contents but rather their style which may 'give away' the autobiographers' selves, and reveal behind the masks and fictions the hidden, (dis)appearing, de-facing faces of Fevvers, Eve/lyn or Dora Chance (and perhaps even a little bit of Carter herself).)

As I have already pointed out the *autobiografictions*' narrative styles certainly imitate the spectacularly performed, self-parodying identities. Fevvers narrates her winged body in a confidence trickster, high-flying narrative mocking her readers unable to grasp her, neither as fiction nor as fact, neither as Bird nor as Woman, neither as miracle nor as hoax. Eve/lyn tells about her irremovable transgender drag in a painfully claustrophobic text, where she decomposes him/her/self in the violent process of becoming *a(-)Woman*. Dora Chance recalls her and her sister's transformations from (self)made-up showgirls, to *femme vitales*, and grotesque hag-seductresses, choreographing their deceitful stories in a flirtatious style. The heroines' 'deviant' identities are trademarked by their irregular bodies, so that—as I shall demonstrate in my close-reading analyses—their *somatized* (self)writing-styles respectively embody the eating and discharging body, the laughing body, or the sexualized female body. Therefore, their reminiscences turn remembering into a literal *re-membering* since their re-invocation of memories is always immediately associated with the recollections of the experience of corporeality and bodily images overabounding in their narrative of the self.

Most memorably in Carter an *epiphanic autobiographical moment* becomes intertwined with the experience of the grotesque female body endowed with creative potentials allowing for feminist empowerment via authorial pleasures. This epiphanic autobiographical moment signifies the end of the story, the chronological terminus of the narrated life *and* also indicates the birth of the autobiographer, the authoress' 'coming-to-text' as an already self-reflexive and meta-text-producing 'writer of the self' re-embodied at the commencement of writing, the starting-point from where the actual retrospective autobiographical narration begins.

Throughout *PNE* Eve/lyn's gender confusion and antagonistic identificatory position-potentials turn his/her re-membering into a dis-membering, during which the regathered memories are associated with uncomfortable, old clothes that do not fit his/her body and cannot hold the self together any more (see Carter 1998, 92). Yet, in the epiphanic autobiographical moment when Eve/lyn faces Tristessa "serene in his marvellous plumage of white hair, with the fatal red hole in his breast, after many, many embraces, he vanishes when

I open my eyes," so the parts of the autobiographer's shattered body and self are recollected via the (dis)appearance of the lost, longed lover's body that brings about, beyond the extreme pains of dis-memberment, a communal sharing in a *heretics of love* (Kristeva 1987) allowing for Freudian sublimation. A self-ironic relief is reflected in the last (initiatory) lines which evoke twisted the traditional topos associating artistic creativity with childbirth, by invoking the symbolically masculine Ocean re-gendered as "mother of mysteries" to "bear [me] to the place of birth" (Carter 1998, 191) of the writing (subject). In *NC* the final story-shot that launches retrospection is related to Fevvers' excited, ecstatic body crouching above Walser in a sensually intense moment to kiss him with a "spiralling tornado of [...] laughter" (Carter 1994, 295) that 'gives away the secret' of her identity, body and narrative by admitting that it cannot be solved, there are no right or wring final conclusive meanings to it. The line "She laughed, she laughed, she laughed." (Carter 1994, 295) marks the autobiographical moment and reveals the engine of the text moved by universal merriment. In *WC*, Dora's autobiographical reminiscences are inserted in-between detailed descriptions of the excessive cosmetic stylizations of her aged body, of her applying a morning-make-up at the beginning and an evening-make-up towards the end of the novel within the very same day (that is the span of her storytelling). This framing suggests the similarity between Dora's excentric *making-up* of her face, of her self and of her text. In the autobiographical moment's final/initial revelation of the tricks of her trade, her strategies of storytelling and seduction, Dora identifies herself in an expressive corporeal image addressing all senses as a showy, smelly, loud, tall-tale telling "batty old hag" "in her ratty old fur and poster paint, her orange (Persian Melon) toenails sticking out of her snakeskin peep-toes, reeking of liquor" (Carter 1991, 5, 227), to displays her grotesque body as the site and source of her text.

In Carter the body constitutes a site and a source of autobiographical knowledge. It is a surface upon which the heroines' lives are ideologically inscribed and subversively re-inscribed. It is a textual engine that (de)composes their representations of the selves. Besides the *embodiment of language* resulting from the somatization of the text and the semioticization of the body, an *embodied memory* turns the life narrative into a space of *embodied knowledge*, and, since the remembering of the identity consistently coincides with the *re-membering* of the body, "the body becomes a locus of identity" (Smith-Watson 2001, 39), the autobiografictionalizing narrators become *re-embodied subjects*.

Feminist theoreticians of autobiography, Julia Watson and Sidonie Smith stress the significance of the material body in the recovery of our memories, the (re)construction of our life narratives, and in the shaping of our sense of identity, the constitution of our subjectivity.

In their view, exploring the body as a site of knowledge and a locus of identity, life narrators shall negotiate and revise cultural discourses distinguishing normative and ab-normative bodies, determining their proper uses and their relationship to specific sites, behaviours, and destinies (Smith-Watson 2001, 41-42). Carter's irregularly feminine, freakish body as a locus of identity discloses how corporeally inscribed, ready-made socio-cultural meanings predetermine the kinds of stories one can tell. It also shows how "the narrating body situated at the nexus of language, gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity, and other specificities" shall exploit its "embodied locatedness" (Smith-Watson 2001, 38) to its own subversive ends: to produce alternative stories, visible 'reciprocal othernesses,' empowering alterities (replacing the ideologically imposed disabling difference and the exclusionary practice of othering). The Carterian re-embodied identity reintroduces within the 'writing of the self' what Sidonie Smith calls "the colourful, nonidentical, carnivalesque, repressed" 'other' (Smith 1993, 20), incarnated by the female body conventionally missing from, marginalized or devalued (as an abstracted *symbol* of male experience) by the patriarchally canonized autobiographical tradition. (In traditional autobiography Woman's, Mother's and the Feminine's function in the text is "to signal the place of lost innocence, the forces of desire pressing upon the individual, or the source of salvation," fulfilling the part of "the non-identical that the autobiographer had to clear out as he struggled toward self-identity and the narrative of a coherent past" (Smith 1993, 19). Contrarily, in Carter, heroines both repeat and mock this tradition. The sublime intacta birdwoman Fevvers' performance relies on her repeatedly challenged immaculacy and highly dubious virginity, Dora embodies the desired arch-seductress with fatal-vital desires of her own, Eve/lyn spectacularly acts out both Eve (figure of 'the Fall') and the Virgin Mary (figure of 'Salvation'), while all their "non-identical" grotesque corporealities constitute the very kernels of all their self-destabilizing identities and narratives.)

As Smith writes in her *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body. Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century* (1993), the unauthorized, unspeakable experiences of the body characteristic of women's autobiographical practices break the official frames governing self-portraiture, transgress the "law of the genre"—that constitutes ideologically sanctioned autobiographical subjects by privileging rationality over corporeality—and destabilize the old discourses of identity, contesting old concepts of self, body and story. They produce an 'other narrative' speaking of woman's revolt against the culturally inscribed, feminized female body through celebrating their *(re)embodied identities* which let the abject and yearned corporeality of "the tremulous private body" (Barker 1984) return from the margins, threatening to disrupt the central places of consciousness and power (Smith 1993, 4, 16).

Accordingly, the Carterian re-embodied subjects' autobiografictions narrate traumatic, ecstatic, revelatory experiences of a woman's life, female corporeal experiences previously excluded from the canonized, high genre of conventional autobiography. *PNE*, emblematized by Eve/lyn's devouring-disgorging, bulimic body and narrative, fictionalizes the revelation of femininity as a social construct, of motherhood as a compulsory myth, and of the cruelty of the Beauty Myth and of the pathological body dysmorphia it enhances, while it even reflects on the individual woman's ambiguous relation to the nascent feminist movement. Fevvers' spiralling laughter vibrating *NC* resonates the energetic infantile laughter experienced after the birth of one's child, while *WC* governed by senile seductresses' decaying, desired-desiring bodies reflects on the insupportability, the inevitability and the significance of death, tempting by giving meaning to life. Finally, each narrator-heroine proves to be a paradoxically positioned writing woman who presents her story of becoming a womanwriter. The stories equally portray her struggles to harmonize her culturally embodied femininity and the aspired authorial agency, and her success in (de)constructing her re-embodied identity as a pleasurable performance or in reinventing her body as an internally subversive textual engine.

In a final 'de-sacralization' of the high genre of autobiography, the autobiografictional text is not signed by the (real) name of its implied author-narrator. (The authoritative Name of the Father is immediately rejected by New Eve/lyn's postoperative re-gendered name, Fevvers' stage-name, or the foundling Dora's name donated by her Grandma Chance.) Instead, the narrator ironically builds her self-identity on her pathologized, sexualized, abjectified female corporeality to teasingly autograph her text with 'mock-feminine' bodies as the devouring-disgorging Eve/lyn's bulimic body, the frenetically laughing Fevvers' hysteric or infantile body, and the seductress Dora Chance's nymphomaniac body.

Strangely, the Carterian self-fictionalization does not evidently stand in sharp contrast with the concept of Truth, but rather outlines a particular, new conception of the truthfulness/falsehood, veracity/lie divides and of the pact of authenticity. Timothy Dow Adams analysing the "highly strategic decision" of deliberately telling lies in literary autobiographical writings—which he considers a consistent misrepresentation of oneself in a paradoxically ambiguous genre mixing fact and fiction—distinguishes between historical-, personal-, psychological-, narrative-, propositional-, and conditional truth, and concludes that from a moral perspective the only adequate definition of a lie is 'a malicious intention to mislead.' According to Adams, autobiographers are like magicians, poker players or baseball managers, whose pretence sanctioned by the spectators—their continuous claiming that "they have nothing up their sleeves, nothing in the cards, nothing planned for the next pitch, all the

while deliberately sending a steady stream of false and true signals, hints and feints"—is designed to keep the game going, and to sustain its excitement. (Adams 1990, 8-9)

On the basis of this argumentation, the Carterian narrator-heroine-implied authoress does not violate the Lejeunian autobiographical pact's provision of truth-telling, since her lifestory's intratextual, implied listeners join the game, enter the show to become collaborating accomplices. The narrator does not propose to tell the One and Only Truth (she does not lay claim on authority or authenticity), but she self-consciously exploits the performative and textual nature and the deconstruable potential of her identity and selfwriting, so that in the end she does tell the truth since at the 'signature of her autobiographical pact' she admits that throughout her story she 'will not tell the Truth' (she will fib, obscure, invent, misremember, and laugh in the fully entertained reader's face). She does not lie since she does not play (ie. *pretend*) (see Lejeune 2003, 275) but plays (ie. *acts out*) her self-construction.

Adam's argument seems completely fitting for the Carterian autobiografictions. The truthfulness/falsehood of a(n autobiographical) narrative is not a matter of the real/fictional character of the (life)story's facts. Rather, narrative-truth is to be found in the relational space between the story, its teller and its reader, and their capacity to make communally sense of the story, to turn it into a shared experience (Adams 1990, 12). Thus, the autobiografictionally 'authentic' representations of the self suggest that Truth (or Reality) refers to what we record in narratives with the intention to save from the putrefaction of forgetfulness, not only what we believe or shall recall, but Truth may also be what is eliminated by master-narratives, what is omitted by selective memory, what we fail to recall or do not wish to remember, what we forget. In a postmodernist manner, Carter realizes Liz Stanley's assumption: "past and present selves [like auto/biographies] seem to be results of competing negotiated versions of what happened, why it happened, with what consequence" and with whom (Stanley 1992, 7).

As an alternative version of Truth is traced, the conventional Lejeunian autobiographical pact is substituted by a *lovers' pact* signed by the doubly performed, mutually binding speech act: "I love you." The former pact's uncompromising objectivity and the ethics of justice is replaced by the understanding solidarity and the *ethics of care* (Gilligan 1986), the *heretics of love* (Kristeva 1987) implied in the latter pact constituting a commitment based on shared pleasures. In the newly found relational space between story, teller and reader, the rigidly rational document closing the subject yields its place to a dynamic texture generated by a writing self identifying itself both as a linguistic construct and a bodily performance, opening it(s)self up to the 'other' within me, inviting all to share this loving embrace within a memorable *freak ethics*. Conforming to Michael Lambek's argumentation, remembering

implies an ongoing morally invested, intersubjective, self-representational practice activated *between* people as a confirmation of the sense of continuity (caring) and discontinuity (mourning) that each person experiences in their relations with *others* (Lambek 1996, 239).

From this perspective, the examined texts can be interpreted as tales of love. Eve/lyn's auto-dis/re-membering reminiscences are initiated and terminated by a vision of the transvestite Tristessa's body that—regardless of the narrator's sex-change—remains both Eve/lyn and Eve's primary object of desire, so that her/his lifewriting is gently embedded within Eve/lyn's very own. By the end of her narrative self-fictionalization Fevvers succeeds in enchanting the objectivity-oriented journalist Walser who becomes a clown for her while she falls (down the tightrope) in love with him. Dora's flirtatious autobiografiction—most direct in exploiting seduction as a narrative strategy and in realizing the postmodern theoretical assumption of 'textual lovemaking'—constitutes a hymn to Love by tenderly chiding and forgiving all her past lovers, and a hymn to Life sang out by the aging heroine who is well aware that, beyond the frames of her life-narrative, every story, like every life must come to an end that sanctifies its very meaning.

Carter, an expert of autobiografiction, enjoyed creating authorial personas for herself as 'the Fairy Godmother,' 'the Mother Goose' or 'the Wolf in Grandma's nightcap' (Sage 1994a, 1)—authorial personas her narrators identify with!—and amused herself with using her inventions to conceal her authorial self rather than reveal it (Gamble 1997, 182). Among her considerable corpus of writings—including nine novels, four collections of shorts-stories, five volumes of children's literature, a volume of cultural criticism, radio-plays, film-scripts, several essays, articles and reviews—we rarely find any autobiographical pieces. However, in my view, she reveals herself in all of her writings in a way that does not necessarily have anything to do with authorial intention or conscious efforts on her part.

A psychological interpretation—that is not the prime object of this study but could be the subject of further exciting analyses—may reveal at the heart of Carter's fiction latent autobiographical 'other texts.' *PNE* that problematizes the social fiction of femininity was written after a journey to Japan where Carter claimed to have learnt what it means to be a woman, *NC* fuelled by an infantile laughter was conceived during Carter's pregnancy and newly explored motherhood, while *WC*, tracing a joyous old age (she and) all would like to have (had) but few can actually experience, was published posthumously immediately after Carter's early death from cancer at age 51. Moreover, even the novelist Carter's over-ornamented "baroque prose aflame with artifice" (Barker 2004, 14) is likely to have autobiographical roots. Her famed linguistic vivacity has been, on the one hand, inspired by

her Yorkshire grandmother, a working-class suffragist and a radical of a memorable "physical and spiritual heaviness" and a talent for story-telling (Carter 1998b, 6). On the other hand, her stylistic ingenuity has possibly been affected by Carter's own manner of speech, her "ribald, allusive, and often caustic" conversations, and her slight stutter (—which, in Paul Barker's view, did not help to make her a well-known public figure of her times (Barker 2004, 14)), a speech-defect that perhaps has been compensated for by her maniac over-writings, and has been re-enacted textually to be consciously controlled via a healing artistic sublimation in *PNE*'s abortive voices, *NC*'s catachresis, and *WC*'s narrative interruptions.

By suggesting that the Carterian *autobiografictions* may coincide with self-effacing yet self-revelatory (fictional-factual, literary-autobiographical) *autofictions*, the fictionalizations of the author's life (Lejeune 2003, 234, 254), by no means do I want to 'resurrect the author' as a source and guarantee of meaning, especially since the postmodern tenet of the 'Death of the Author'[39] (Barthes 1977) is supported by the Carterian fictions' self-effacing narrators inviting to readerly interaction and enhancing creative potentials. I simply think that autobiografictions perfectly illustrate Hélène Cixous' line: "All biographies like all autobiographies like all narratives tell one story in place of another" (Anderson 2001, 1), and reinforce Carter's line she wrote to a preface to Walter de Mare's *Memoirs of a Midget*: "all fiction is symbolic autobiography!" (Sage 1999, 10). Thus, Carter's is a polyphonic text in which the reader can decipher 'behind' the magical realist *fictional autobiographical* text a postmodern writing subject's *self-fictionalizations* which may hide traces of a highly personal *autofiction* (besides the corporeagraphic metafictional and the somatized body-textual layers).

Instead of presenting a coherent narrative of a unified self, the autobiografiction emphasizes the very process of the seemingly capricious but highly self-conscious, self-reflexive (de)constructions of metamorphic identites and texts. It is a life-writing that does not fix the identity, but rather leaves its free flow and encourages its dynamic heterogeneity. Autobiografiction builds on a fundamental feature of the genre, namely that autobiography signifies a story that must remain incomplete as the narrator can never describe her own death. Thus, it generates playfully open texts which sustain the illusion of incompleteness. The final lines describe Fevvers's spiralling tornado of laughter, the pregnant Eve/lyn sailing away on an infinite ocean towards unknowable territories, or Dora Chance repeatedly rewriting her story's ending to disappear singing in a moonlit street. In my view, these open-endings invite readers to make up innovative endings which please them most, to create new beginnings, and to innovate re-embodied identities and invent autobiografictions of their own.

5. Methodologies of Interpreting Bodies and Texts

I interpret corporeagraphic metafictional body-texts from multiple perspectives using bifocal, hybrid reading strategies of my own, forged from various theoretical stances shaped to the deform form of Carter's feminist grotesque bodies, self-freaking re-embodied identities, and somatized narratives which remain in the primary focus of analysis.

My interpretive method is primarily a complex gender-sensitive approach. Throughout my analyses, I perform a *feminist reading* in the 1970s' initial feminist literary critical sense summarized in Elaine Showalter's 1981 "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness." Accordingly, I consider images and stereotypes of women in literature (particularly *clichés* of femininity), I touch upon the omissions and misconceptions about women in criticism (focusing on muses, Echoes, silly lady novelists and madwomenwriters), and 'woman-as-sign' in semiotic systems (with a highlight on the complex relationship of disembodiment ['woman as arabesque'] and over-corporealization ['woman as pre-symbolic flesh']). (Showalter 1985, 245) Conforming to this trend, I examine "how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us, how the very act of naming has been a male prerogative, and how we can begin to see and name—and therefore live—afresh" (Rich 1985, 2044).

Despite my concern on bifocality, (self)ironic revision, and revamped spectacle, I go beyond the "revisionary imperative," this feminist obsession with demystifying and deconstructing the 'male critical theory' that circumscribes creativity, readerly reception and literary history uniquely on the basis of universalized masculine experience and patriarchal social norms. Moving further, I also investigate the Carterian corpus as *women's literature* to explore how womanhood, femininity and feminism shape a woman's creative expressions and interpretations. I perform a *gynocritical analysis* described by Showalter as the study of "women *as writers*, the history, styles, themes, genres, and structures of writing by women, the psychodynamics of female creativity, the trajectory of the individual and collective female career, and the evolution and laws of a female literary tradition" (Showalter 1985, 248).

Yet, I am the most concerned about the "process of (reading and writing) woman," (Jardine 1989, 19) and specifically the process of (de)coding metamorphic freakish female 'bodies-in-process' in(to) discourse. Therefore, my interpretations make considerable use of Alice A. Jardine's strategy of *gynesis*, focusing on "the putting into discourse of 'woman' as a process," and the study of *gynema* as a "reading effect, a woman-in-effect," as a place where fixed meaning starts to break down, stories break loose, and coherent identity becomes destabilized through narrative gaps or overflows. I concentrate on faltering narration, torn textures, slippages in signification, textual ruptures where "the narrative loses control" to let

otherness—in Jardine: *woman/feminine*, in my analyses: *freakish corporeality*—disrupt the seamless stabile structure of the (metaphorically *masculine*) text (Jardine 1989, 25).

Much as I find Jardine's strategy useful, I find it vital to stress repeatedly that I never intend to consider 'masculine' and 'feminine' discourse (matching theoretical concepts of *phallogocentric language* and *écriture feminine*) as natural opposites to be taken at face value. I rather regard them either as culturally-, ideologically- produced, contrasted, hierarchized stereotypes, or, at most, as metaphors standing for the muted Unspeakable's subverting the loauded, audible dominant discourse. I do not study women's writings, bodies or identities in terms of difference or similarity (*like* or *opposed to* 'the masculine'), but instead analyse them on their own right, in terms of alterity, relationality, and overall heterogeneity.

This heterogeneity is the reason why I disagree with the common assumption that labels contemporary Anglo-American and French 'feminisms' as radically opposed, mutually exclusive trends. I regard them—from a bifocal viewpoint—as complementary strategies (of the ideology-critical *post-semiotics of the subject* (Kiss 1996, 9-28)) which together enable our comprehension of perplexingly grotesque bodies, texts and identities. In my view, the Anglo-American *materialist feminist gender studies*—featuring Bordo, Butler, De Lauretis and Grosz—concentrate on what Attila Kiss calls the subject's *macrodynamics* (Kiss 1995, 15), on the social-historical-ideological pre-scription of the feminized subject. (They rely on Marx, Foucault, Althusser and Habermas to investigate the functions and interrelations of power, discourse, representation and knowledge in the constitution of the engendered subject as a social being). On the other hand, the French *études féminines* and the metaphorically 'feminine' (i.e. subversion-seeking) *semanalysis*—marked by the names of Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva—focus from a semiotic-psychoanalytic-linguistic perspective on Kiss' *microdynamics* of the subject. (Elaborating on Freud and Lacan, they examine irrepressible corporeal drives, haunting desires, unconscious dreams, their connections with repression, socialization, symbolization, with the formation of the (feminized) ego, the heterogeneous subject, and with semiotic subversion, poetic revolution and identity catastrophe.)

Throughout my analyses of Carter's texts, I rely simultaneously on Bordo, Butler, De Lauretis, Grosz, Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva alike, since I believe that the aforementioned theoretical approaches both reflect on the 'subjectivity-language-(engendered) identity triad' with a specific focus on the body. There is only a slight difference. The former concentrates on the 'outer' socio-cultural mechanisms, the culturally-ideologically pre-scribed *text written on the body*, and the self-reflexive, self-re-writing performances of subversive re-embodiments. The latter spotlights the 'inner,' repressed and returning psychic 'residue's, the

psychosexual processes' consciousness-troubling (unconscious, irrational, schizophrenically plural) *writing from the body*, as well as the *body in the text* featuring in the performance of polyphonic-palimpsestic textual corpuses vibrated and (de)composed by its undescribable material corporeality. (Both *texts on bodies* and *bodies in texts* can contribute to changes in the socio-symbolic sphere via modifications in representations bringing about 'corruptions' in the constitution of the subjectivity.) The simultaneous use of these two methods—both useful strategies for *body studies*—elucidates that Kiss' *macrodynamics* and *microdynamics*, politics and poetics, centralizing action and decentralizing vision, self-consciousness and self-consuming passion, collective and individual, Woman and women are so inseparably intertwined that merely their synchronous analysis enables an all-round reading of polymorphous subjectivities, bodies, texts, identities proliferating in the Carterian oeuvre.

My readerly location—very similar to Carter's position—tackles problematic issues of body, text and identity from a white, Western, intellectual, heterosexual feminist perspective. Yet—despite my/our locatedness in a mainstream feminist positionality—my analyses, like Carter's works, also touch upon 'minority-issues' of age, class, nationality and sexual orientation through a focus on protagonists as the septuagenarian Chances, the Cockney Fevvers, the queer Eve/lyn, working class showgirls and circus aerialistes. With Carter, I provide a thorough criticism of patriarchy's sexism, heteronormativism and reproduction-compulsion, just as much as of consumerism's agism, aesthetism, post-industrialist capitalist society's classism, and of hegemonic culture's other modes of marginalization. Certainly, a specific attention is paid to the ideological- and discursive- production, control, and transgression of bodies conventionally labelled abnormal, dysfunctional, unaesthetic, multiply challenged freaks, which here appear as alternatively abled, enabling, liberating entities.

This 'relativization-decentralization' designates a common project of feminism and of the poststructuralist post-semiotics of the subject. Thus, my study, concentrating on the dynamically metamorphosing heterogeneous *subject-in-process* and the endlessly deferring *meaning-on-trial* (Kristeva 1985a, 216) in their relation to *engendering*, uses an interpretive method that can be identified with that of *poststructuralist feminist theory* (see Weedon 1997). I am indebted to major post-structuralist thinkers as Foucault, Lacan, Derrida, Deleuze, Barthes or Baudrillard, and particularly their feminist reconsiderations by Kristeva, De Lauretis, Butler or Bordo, whose strategies and ideas (on technologies and configurations of power, cultural subject-constitutions, discursive formations, knowledge production, self-deconstructing systems, disseminating meanings, identity-catastrophes, textual-, sexual-, corporeal-subversions) guide my argumentation throughout my close-readings of Carter.

My interpretation is deconstructive in so far as it goes beyond 'surface meanings,' and tries to reveal the psychologically-, ideologically-, discursively- repressed 'latent contents' through a "symptomatic reading" (see Jardine 1989) that performs a stylistic, narratological analysis of the self-destabilizing text's 'telling' gaps, blindspots, unlimited overwritings, cacophonic polyphonies, as well as of its intra- and inter-textual rhetorical games of clashing 'plain' literary and figurative or ironic, 'base' readable and 'supplementary' unspoken meanings. Conforming to the (anti-)theoretical tenets of deconstruction, my interpretations never demand the authority of final meanings, the traumas and *jouissances* revealed in the 'latent' text are never attributed to the author's (Angela Carter's or my analyst-authorial-self's) intentions or personality, as the self-deconstructive texts are assumed to 'come to a life of their own' to communicate exciting 'extra-meanings' to readers ready to enter into play.

Despite my preference for the deconstructive approach, throughout my close-reading interpretations I also apply structuralist strategies which permit the assiduous analysis of the studied textual components' significance in the (un)structuring of the text as a coherent (but heterogeneous) system. Tables help to compare and contrast leitmotifs, plot-structures and 'key-topics,' while stylistic-, linguistic-, thematic-, narrative- parallels allow for the study the 'textual evidences'' rules of combination and subversive variations (conforming to the literary conventions organizing and the individual tactics overturning them). Nevertheless, my analyses do not regard formal structures 'neutral,' as their feminist, politically involved nature prefers an 'interpretation with stakes' focusing on 'charged' cultural phenomena of social structures, keeping in mind that these (un)structurings are not essential properties of stable narratives, but are being constantly (re)constructed by co-authoring readers. Undoing structures, my analyses suggest that any system (a literary work of art or a social structure), no matter how well organized, is inherently endowed with its potential subversion, by something exceeding, escaping or transgressing it (—with the once structuralist, later poststructuralist Roland Barthes' *bon-mot*: "Literature is the question minus the answer").

My simultaneous interest in fictional *and* non-literary (social) narratives' conventionally prescribed and repressed-revolting subversive forms convinced me to combine the close-reading, textual analysis and the ideology-critical, political interpretation—reading strategies similarly concerned with the narratives' heterogeneous systematicity and subversive 'latent contents' alike. The poststructuralist narratological[40] aspect of my project—relying on Brooks and De Lauretis—considers, from plural perspectives, narratives as dynamic operations fuelled by polyphonic voices, palimpsestic textures, self-deconstructing plot-structures, and troubling stylistic imbroglios (enhanced by metamorphosing, self-freaking bodies in the text).

My narratological approach is complemented by a 'study of identity politics' that is necessitated by the Carterian narratives' prominent features as: the (mock)autobiographical quality, the systematic invitation to identification and to the recognition of mis-self-recognition (with/in social representations of femininity), and the discursive de/re-constructions of metamorphic identities during self-fictionalizing corporeal-, textual performances. As I reveal how a self-stylizing, re-embodied, "relational model of identity" (see Barát 2000) replaces in Carter the hegemonically reinforced subjectivity based on domination and illusory homogeneity, I also disclose her fiction's intersections with cutting-edge contemporary theories as border studies, body studies, performance studies, and especially feminist ethics.

My close-reading textual analyses combine the aforementioned various theoretical perspectives in an interdisciplinary manner. My analysis of *PNE* combines a structuralism- and gynocriticism-inspired study of stereotypes of femininity, a systematic feminist geographical analysis of (de)formations of textual/corporeal topographies and anatomies, in search of latent meanings beyond formalism. My study of this novel concludes with poststructuralist narratological interpretations of contradictory, mutually abortive or castrating narrative voices, as well as with a deconstructive attempt at finding the corporeal supplement subversively (de)composing the text from within. In my interpretation of *NC* I start out from a structuralist feminist study putting into parallel the thematic and rhetorical occurrences of the winged giantess' feminist grotesque body and text. I move through a gynocritical- identity-political approach of her self-spectacularizing corporeal-, textual- performances, to arrive at a 'narrative blind-spot'-seeking, deconstructive, gynesis-fuelled reading of other laughing bodies and texts beyond hers. My reading of *WC* fuses strategies of poststructuralist narratology, feminist identity politics, theories of autobiography, and deconstruction willing to examine narrative (re)constructions and deconstructive performances of identities through concentrating on Dora's 'making-up' her face, her femininity, her identity and her text alike in a game of signs where the logic of re-presentation is substituted by logic of seduction.

The common characteristic of my analyses is that, albeit from differing perspectives, they all concentrate on the *self-freaking body, text and identity* interrelated, and of crucial importance in Carter's fiction. My final goal is to unveil how the Carterian self-freakings problematize masculinized authoritative authorial positionality, patriarchally canonized literary conventions, inherited interpretive strategies aiming at final meanings, or *écriture féminine* and *phallogocentric discourse* as mutually exclusive, stereotypically engendered categories, with the aim to create in the long run a self-deconstructive women's writing able

to depict the paradoxically positioned 'feminist-feminine-female subject in process.' I wish to show how Carter's texts facilitate the understanding of engendered subjectivity, (re)embodied identity, contained corporeality, and social narratives of difference in a way that accounts for their inherent dynamics: their internal ambiguities, transgressive potentials, irrepressible excesses, metamorphic transformations, and enabling alterities.

Although my study as a feminist analysis is politically committed to the disclosure of the production of gendered meanings, the identification of engendered power relations, and the enhancement of their transformation (via a feminist ethics), my interpretations refuse being program readings governed by feminist politics. They are primarily literary textual analyses which use pluri-dimensional, emphatically subjective readings to open up the texts from multiple perspectives, to playfully generate an infinite proliferation of meanings. My interpretation follows Anette Kolodny's feminist reading: I try to ask new questions, liberate different significances, but in the process I "claim neither definitiveness nor structural completeness for [my] different readings and reading systems, but only their usefulness in recognizing the particular achievements of woman-as-author and their applicability in conscientiously decoding woman-as-sign" (Kolodny 1991, 110).

Certainly, in this sense, I remain faithful to reader-response criticism in so far as my interpretations are non-authoritative, often open-ended subjective readings performed from my own partial perspective in which the intertexts read along with the Carterian fictions are not only the above mentioned theoretical trends' major texts but also, perhaps less apparently but more decisively, texts from my own life woven around a multiplicity of grotesque bodies—childhood experiences of my grandfather's paralyzed body as the source of wisdom, my mother's unforgettably desirable, sacrificial body generously offering itself as a text to be discovered, my father's omnipresent invisible body, my grandmother's cancerous sublime body of an angel, later the white of my lover's rolled back eyes, my own (de)forming pregnant body, opening, lactating, transforming to be shared, and the foreign-familiar bodies of my two baby-daughters—all cherished grotesque bodies to whom I wish to dedicate this study despite the fact that they remain the unsaid, latent subtexts of my study, accessible, recuperable perhaps later in other, fictional wor(l)ds.

I must admit that my initial proposition on the 'content-style parallel,' the determinant relationship of rhetorical and thematic aspects prevalent in all literary texts, (and on 'the body in the text' and 'the text on the body' parallel specific of Carter) not only provided the starting point of my study, but also has finally affected my own writing style. During the composition of my interpretations on the spectacularly self-freaking bodies' and narratives' performances I

have perhaps over-identified with the analysed material, as occasionally my style becomes overwritten or ruptured. Nevertheless, I hope, that this emerging 'grotesque-patchwork-quality' instead of depriving my study of its academic merits, attests or evokes my intense pleasure of the studied texts, and encourages the reader to share them by entering into a play of her own with Carter's fiction.

In my view, playfulness is a primary characteristic of Angela Carter's texts. As a magical realist text it makes fun of readers by disorientating them switching between magical and realist contexts without providing rational explanations or metalingual commentaries. As a metafiction it calls attention to the rules of textual games and explores how we each play our social realities. As an autobiografiction it presents teasing narrative (re/de)constructions of identities. As a poststructuralist narrative it incites a play with language, generates 'narrative-nettlers' or 'reader-teasers,' and draws a self-ironic parallel between mandatory and mocking (somatized) textual and (semioticized) corporeal performances. As a feminist text it heralds communal play and shared laughter as new means of communication of a society based on solidarity. Its co-author-readers are invited as players to (de)compose textual meanings.

All this leads us to the highly philosophical, ontological yet extremely banal question "What makes a human being a human being?", with an answer located at the kernel of the Carterian text that provides a definition of the human being (coinciding with the definition of the implied author and the implied reader alike) at the meeting of four feature-axes. She is certainly a *homo ludens* who perceives perspectives and potentials of play. She is a *homo ridens* who invites and shares laughters resulting of her play. She is a *homo narrans*[41] who not only experiences her life as a set of narratives (with characters, conflicts, beginnings, middles and ends) but also feels an urge to storytelling, a compulsion to narrate her stories of her laughters, her plays, her life. Lastly, she is a *homo moriens* a being aware of her mortality, who knows that every day she gets closer to her own death, and alleviates this terrible knowledge with the help of survival-enabling, soothing play, laughter and narratives.

III. Narrating the Nervous, Bulimic Body-text.
Grotesque Self-(de)composition in Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve*[42]

"klitorisz peccata mundi" (Esterházy 1986, 133)
"Madonna pokalipszis" (Orbán 1999)[43]

1. A Confusing Space of Transformation

When a study proposes to provide a thorough examination of the dynamic textualization of the metamorphic freakish body in Angela Carter's writings, the first text that the analyst

must inevitably dwell upon is *PNE*,[44] indubitably the most grotesquely 'transitional' text of the Carterian corpus. *PNE* published in 1977 is an 'in-between text,' a turning-point, a confusing space of transformation that marks a gradual yet radical change in Carter's writing. After her realistic 'Bristol Trilogy' (1966's *Shadow Dance*, 1968's *Several Perceptions*, 1971's *Love*), these static texts called by Lorna Sage mausoleum-like cabinets of curiosities (Sage 1994b, 11), after her 1969 rigid science-fictional dystopia *Heroes and Villains* and the violent surrealist collage of the 1972 *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*, Carter seems to turn decisively towards fantastic, joyously turbulent, allegorical picaresque speculative fictions vitalized by a polyphonic magical realist voice that becomes more and more overtly charged with an ironic ideology criticism and a feminist politics.

In my view, Carter's four final novels—of which I shall concentrate on three here—should be interpreted as a sequence, in which 1972's *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*'s protagonist is a masculine desire ridden picaro, Desiderio, 1984's *NC*'s heroine is the aerialiste picara Fevvers whose feminine charms are redoubled in the final swansong, 1992's *WC*, starring the bohemian seductress Chance twins. In this picaresque series the 1977 *PNE* constitutes the 'second volume,' describing an ambivalent, transitional passion between 'masculine' infernal desires and 'feminine' spectacularized mock-sentimentality. This bizarre novel's transsexual hero/ine, New Eve/lyn, mirrored by the transvestite star, Tristessa, truly embodies an 'in-between,' gender-bender, Tiresias-like destabilizing picaro-picara fusion.

In the Carterian oeuvre, novels, in their chronological succession, shift gradually from a static gloomy realism to a dynamic picaresque magical realism, from ruthless heroes to witty heroines, from obsession with patriarchs to the celebration of daughters, and as Paulina Palmer claims, from coded mannequin to bird woman, from femininity as masochist entrapment to femininity as feminist self-realization (see Palmer 1987). In her "Notes from the Front Line" Carter describes *PNE* as an "anti-mythic novel[...]conceived as a feminist tract about the social creation of femininity" (Carter 1983, 71), while in an interview with John Haffenden she calls it "a careful and elaborate discussion of femininity as a commodity,[...as] an illusion" (Haffenden 1985, 86). Indeed the majority of critics praise the novel for being one of if not *the* most effective of Carter's feminist political attempts. Harriet Blodgett praises the text for being a "genuine revisionist fiction" (Blodgett 1994, 49) enhancing female power and countering the inscription of patriarchy. Alison Lee stresses its powerful critique of engendering images. (Lee 1997) Sarah Gamble underlines Carter's successful transgression of the binary essentialism of representation and gender categories. (Gamble 1997, 118) Merja Makinen heralds female sexual and textual aggression represented

in a positive light. (Makinen 1997, 150) Lindsay Tucker with Susan Suleiman highlights the novel's enabling postmodern feminist fictional strategy (Tucker 1998, 11), while Heather L. Johnson enjoys her "frisson of narrative pleasure" (Johnson 1997, 178) due to the liberating possibilities of the refigured, transgendered body. From this perspective, the in-between novel can be interpreted as a re-enaction of the crucial turn in Carter's literary career, her transformation from what she calls in her "Notes from the Front Line" "a male impersonator" (Carter 1983, 70) into a politically self-conscious woman-writer.

Yet, most strangely, the novel completely lacks the celebratory tone of Carter's subsequent feminist novels, and to me seems more of a dark vision, "a bitter and quite uncomfortable book to read," or at most a "piece of black comedy" (as Carter herself coins the novel (Haffenden 1985, 86)). Therefore, in my view, the novel does not lend itself to a fully triumphant feminist reading. Although the *PNE* resembles Carter's most famous novel, *NC* by being over-abounded with spectacularly freakish bodies and self-ironic textual performances provoking gender- and genre trouble as well as narrative- and identity-confusion, yet the story of New Eve/lyn entirely lacks the communal carnivalesque laughter resonating the comic tale of the winged giantess aerialiste. On the contrary, the painfully passionate text is fuelled by the freakishly nervous feminine body marked by pain, and "locked into a regressive circulation of literary metaphors of fatal, apparitional, mechanical femininity" forged by patriarchy (Britzolakis 1997, 50). As the novel unveils the grotesque agony of 'becoming woman,' the cacophonic text is cruelly torn apart by contradictory yet fatally embracing narrative voices. Male impersonator, mock-feminine, self-reflexive feminist or transgender (parading transvestite or transsexual autobiographical) voices "become legion" (Deleuze-Guattari 1980, 9) decomposing the body-text. They re-enact semioticized painful psychosomatic disorders and corporeal deformations resulting from the subject's violent engendering, and producing misconceived images of self-distorting bodies and selves.

I wish to reveal that *PNE* illustrates a *par excellence* transitional stage in the Carterian corpus. It discloses a femininity that is simultaneously spectacular performance and painful entrapment. It rediscovers mothers to demythologize them cruelly as mere figures of speech. It traces an illusory picaresque journey that returns disillusioned and disinterested to its stagnant point of origin. Its sadistic masculine hero proves to be its suffering feminine heroine. It is just as much challenging to scrutinize the feminist fictional intentions and achievements of a novel that seems to speak up self-evidently in a male impersonator's voice, as it is thought-provoking to perform a gender-sensitive analysis of a piece of woman's writing disintegrated by ruthlessly freaked, hurting female bodies.

2. A "Male Impersonator's" Writing[45]

i. A Plot of Pain

The first reading discloses the novel as a piece of "male impersonator's" writing by a woman-writer "suffering a degree of colonialisation of the mind," positing the masculinist point of view as a general one (Carter 1983, 70). The story faces readers with perplexingly heartless protagonists lost in the chaotic scenes, the ill-logic and the ferocious scenarios of a post-apocalyptic, hellish world, as they senselessly suffer in a picaresque journey that proves to be the vicious circle of a plot of pain inflicting particular torments on feminine characters. The novel's very first sentence introduces to us the hero, Evelyn, a young English professor with "perfectly normal" (9) masculine desires and sexual prehistory. "The last night I spent in London, I took some girl or other to the movies and, through her mediation, I paid you a little tribute of spermatozoa, Tristessa"(5)—admits Evelyn, and continues his macho confessions by recalling how he likes to amuse himself by tying his partner to a bed before copulating with her, and how he enjoys making a nameless girl "get to her knees in the dark on the dirty floor of the cinema, among the cigarette ends and empty potato crisp bags and trodden orangeade containers, and suck[... him] off" while with his necrophiliac arousal, his objectifying male gaze's scopophiliac pleasures, and his sadism and fetishism equally satisfied, he watches on the screen the "exquisite suffering," the "emblematic despair" and the "wounds of martyrdom" of Tristessa, the ideal perfection of femininity, the adored movie star ravishing all male spectators with her "magic and passionate sorrow" and performance of pain (8-9). Evelyn, on arriving to America, naturally finds a sadistic pleasure in the chaos of dissolution embodied for him by the irresistibly luring, hyper-feminine Leilah, whom he cruelly denigrates, sexually abuses and abandons in the apocalyptic city to flee for the desert, willing to find there *himself*. Ironically, a group of militant feminist Amazons capture Evelyn and take revenge on him for his misogynistic masculinity by granting him with *herself*. In the women's city of Beulah, the self-made fertility goddess and mad scientist, Mother ritually rapes, castrates and surgically transforms Evelyn in an elaborate sex change operation into a perfect woman, New Eve, designed as bearer of the New Messiah of Anti-Thesis. Though Eve escapes from Beulah, from then on she is doomed to identify with cruelly grotesque embodiments of femininity, and must experience the pains of becoming a woman himself/herself. Castrated, raped, humiliated, battered, and persecuted on his/her voyage, New Eve is finally fecundated with a child by Tristessa, who turns out to be a biologically male cross-dressing transvestite performing in drag the illusory essence of Woman, embodying his

"ineradicable male" desires (173) to propagate the patriarchal myth of idealized masochistic femininity. New Eve is always on the run in her journey, yet, more and more violently interpellated as a femininized subject, she keeps being entrapped in narratives of victimization. She witnesses phallogocentric fictions of femininity—of the Femme Fatale, the Angel in the House, the Mother, the Virgin or the Enigma—which prove to be theoretically or practically damaging for female anatomy, agency and authorship alike. *PNE* viciously (de)faces and disfigures its heroines with these insupportable yet inevitable communal myths, revealing them as mean, mutilating and meaningless by the multiplication of ruined, muted, freaked feminine bodies.

ii. Mean, Mutilating and Meaningless Myths

PNE narrates a story of passion in a gender-sensitive reinterpretation of the religious sense of the word: it is a novel on the passion of becoming woman. It demonstrates, *à la* Simone de Beauvoir, that one is not born but is rather painfully forged into a woman (De Beauvoir 1969, 197), by being "always already" ideologically framed icon-like by limiting patriarchal representations, and being culturally trapped by social fictions of femininity associating her with suffering corporeality.

The patriarchal myth of the *femme fatale* as 'good bad girl' is embodied by Leilah, a blossoming black teenager from the ghettos, who is associated by Evelyn with an excessive series of patriarchal, archetypal tropes of the fatally attractive, sexually insatiable, castratingly devouring femininity. She is siren, nymph, succubus, Lorelei, Rahab, the Harlot and Lilith. Abjectified as "profane essence of the death of the cities," "beautiful garbage eater" (18), a rotten fruit, a poisoned wound (25), "mud Lily" (29), and "dressed meat" (31) she is 'duly' punished as "a born victim—submit[ing] to beatings and degradations with a curious, ironic laughter" (28). This freakish Lolita-femme fatale, a child sucking on lollypops, with playfully painted neon violet nipples, resembling an innocent shepherdess costumed in the seductive apparatus of stilettos, cache-sexes and furs is constantly (mis)understood and (mis)interpreted by Evelyn as the incomprehensible feminine 'other.' He hears only her "soft wordless songs" (19,21), a strange argot and patois (26), a speech containing more expostulations than sentences (18) "more like a demented bird than a woman, warbling arias of invocation or demand" (19). He finally 'beats her to silence' before abandoning her as a "broken thing" (35), and dooming this freaked doll to her 'well-deserved' fate of painful pregnancy (accompanied by swollen breasts, terrible morning sickness retching, and hysterical fits) followed by an abortion with infection, hysterectomy and a tragically early sterility.

The patriarchal cult of sacred, self-sacrificing motherhood is recalled by Mother, the ingenious scientist and self-made maternal goddess of Beulah, displaying two tiers of surgically transplanted nipples grafted on her chest as well as an enormous beard on her mask-like face. She transforms herself into an incarnate symbol, a "paradigm of mothering" (60), the "concrete essence of woman" (60), "her own mythological artifact" (60), "a hand-carved figurehead of her own, self-constructed theology" (58). She "undergoes a painful metamorphosis of the entire body [to] become the abstraction of a natural principle" (49), and "reconstruct[s] her flesh painfully with knives and with needles into a transcendental form as an emblem, as an example" (60) of the divine Mother, who embodies both the Great Parricide, the Grand Emasculator (49) *and* the destination, the consolatory home, the Nirvana of non-being of all men (59). She is at the same time a wound that does not heal, the source of all desire *and* the water of life (64), the fertility amidst the infertile desert. She contains a castrating volcano of engulfing femininity in her gaping vagina *and* a phallic sun in her mouth (64). She fuses Danae, Alphio, Demeter, Kali, Maria, and Aphrodite into one. The myopic masculine view of Evelyn cannot perceive that in her self-freaking re-incarnations Mother unveils the illusory, universalizing, essentialist nature of the fiction of the 'mother,' as well as the painful consequences of this 'consolatory myth' for women, while revealing maternity as an impossible paradox with contradictory expectations framed within harmful myths of femininity. Mother's speech is just as unintelligible for Evelyn as that of Leilah. She speaks in an archaic tongue of clicks and grunts or in self-celebratory hymns, bays like a bloodhound bitch, or murmurs like a maternal womb, never ripening to a rational discourse comprehensible for men. Evelyn is unable to recognize the potentially powerful, subversive or sublime, feminist grotesque in Mother's figure. He merely regards her as a frightening "sacred monster" (54), a disgusting freak, "Mother, but too much mother, a femaleness too vast, too gross" (66). As Heather L. Johnson notes, his limited male perspective's interpretive failure deforms the life-affirming, celebratory Bakhtinian-Rabelesian grotesque into a repulsive, derogatory post-Romantic concept of the grotesque (Johnson 1994). Accordingly, this excessive motherhood, (mis)interpreted by Evelyn's normative patriarchal narrative as a disturbing irregularity, is 'appropriately' marginalized. When at the end of the journey Eve/lyn meets Mother again, she is secluded to the End of the World as a miserable embodiment of Russo's "female grotesque." After a nervous breakdown, having realized the impossibility of her omnipotence, she is nothing more than a blind, lone, mad old lady with a hair dyed the brave canary yellow of an expensive ice-cream sundae, decorated with peek-a-boo bows of pink silk ribbon, sporting a spotted bikini on her wrinkled body, drinking vodka

and singing absent-mindedly to herself. Then, Eve/lyn can rightfully denigrate her: "Mother is [nothing more than] a figure of speech and has retired to a cave beyond consciousness" (184).

The stereotypical image of femininity personified by the Victorian Angel in the House, the docile wife completely subservient to her adulated husband is called to life by the women in Zero's harem. They also reflect the contemporary housewife, who submits willingly to the patriarchal economic exploitation of unpaid housework and to the 'unanimously legalised, socially sanctified' domestic violence, who accepts the marital abuse of the family-head reducing her to the paradoxically *secondary* status of the *primary* caretaker, forever entrapped in the despised, feminized realm of the private. The Charles Manson-like, self-appointed Nietzschian *Übermensch,* sterile and misogynistic mad poet, the one eyed and one legged Zero "believed women were fashioned of a different soul substance from men, a more primitive, animal stuff" (87), and consequently demands absolute humility from his wives. He forbids them to speak in words, pokes them with his artificial member, beats them with a gigantic bullwhip, smears his own and his dog's excrement upon their breasts, rapes one of them each day, and tailors their bodies to match his deformity. Zero's seven wives, naked, apart from their faded dungaree uniforms and heavy wedding rings, with angry marks of love-bites on the exposed flesh, their hair cut extremely short, and their incisor teeth pulled out, are grotesque embodiments of the suffering 20th century household angel. Eve/lyn cannot understand the seven wives, not only because they babble gibberish, whisper, howl, hoot, roar, mew, squeak and cluck like a flying menagerie (85, 86, 89), but also because even his/her ineradicably masculine worldview is shocked by the blind subservience and stupid superstition with which they accept their fate. Despite everything these ignorant "postulants in the church of Zero" (87) "did not think they were fit to pick up the crumbs from his table, at which he ate in his solitary splendour" (85), as they are made to believe that sexual intercourse with Zero guarantees their continuing strength and health. These freakish women in pain paradoxically embody both the Angel in the House and the martyr without a cause, embracing stereotypically feminine attributes of self-sacrifice and non-productive expenditure in one. They finally turn into enraged maenads when they attack Tristessa's hiding place and are annihilated by the self-exploding whirling glass castle that sweeps them away like grotesque remnants, shattered debris, fragments of their fossilized myth.

The traditionally feminine archetype of the Virgin or the Virgin Mother is incorporated by the hero/ine Eve/lyn upon whom Mother wishes to reactivate the parthenogenesis archetype by castrating him and excavating the "fructifying female space" (68) inside him, to make him the perfect specimen of womanhood who is to be impregnated with his own sperm.

Hence, the mythical Immaculate Conception becomes a feminist political gesture in a hyper-technological scientific experiment, turning the Virgin Mother into an androgynous cyborg, an "artificial changeling." This 'synthetic' "Tiresias of Southern California" (71) challenges normative gender binaries by promising to re-embody the new Messiah of Anti-Thesis via a multiply hermaphroditic fusion. In a grotesque confusion, the New Virgin Mother is named Eva after the first fallen woman, culprit and victim of the primal sin, doomed to eternal punishment and repent. In her picaresque passion she is invited to blend the shameful, abject pain of the sinful female flesh with the immaculate, transcendental suffering of the *Mater Dolorosa*. Eve is repeatedly raped, but—as her polyphonic narrative reveals—(s)he contemplates the violence targeted at her femininity from a distinct, masculine perspective. Thus, in a sense, she remains intact, an eternal virgin, containing the intarnishable simulacrum of the unstained essence of femininity. New Eve's mirror image, a double of the New Virgin Mother is the equally androgynous Tristessa, who impregnates Eve/lyn as a biological man, yet whom New Eve's first desire associates with her mother (123),[46] and whom the paranoid Zero regards the "Typhoid *Mary* of Sterility" (104). As Tristessa never ceases to fully identify with his performance of femininity, he remains "Our Lady of Dissolution" (15), "Our Lady of Sorrows" (71), more of a Virgin Mother than a Phallic father.

When New Eve, after Mother's drastic surgical intervention, becomes the perfection of femininity incarnated, her first experience of womanhood is associated with pain, a literalized castration anxiety, a desperate "awakening to a sense of deadened pain—a knowledge of grievous internal wounds that would never heal, never" (71). After her operation, along with the daily injections of female hormones, New Eve is subjected to a psychosomatic conditioning displaying all the pains of womanhood she is violently interpellated to interiorize in order to become a 'real' feminine woman fitting the patriarchal scenario. She is initiated to all the mythic icons, stereotypical representations and social fictions of femininity, spiritually, mentally or physically damaging female anatomy and agency. During Eve's feminization, idealized representations of "every single Virgin and Child that had ever been painted in the entire history of Western European art" (72), uteral imagery of symbolic receptacles as caves, sea anemones, roses, sea and moon mingle with soundtracks of gurgling babies, murmuring mothers, and the liturgy of the Holy Mother combined with lectures on female genital mutilation, Chinese foot-binding and Jewish ankle-chaining of women, Indian widows burning on funeral pyres, and old Hollywood movies starring Tristessa endlessly tormented by an "exquisite pain," "incomparable tears and sickness," and the "ache of eternal longing" (72). When New Eve finally concludes that it is a real punishment to be transformed into a

woman, Mother laughingly admits that "of course [he] will not be happy as a woman" (76), as femininity can only be synonymous with the performance of pain. Apparently in Carter's view, there is no way out of the prison-house of fossilized myths, since even the feminist scientists of Beulah—though they shout at Evelyn with revengeful feminist rage: "this is what you've made of women! And now you yourself become what you've made!" (71)—seem to be framed within the same old patriarchal fatal fictions of femininity. The absconding Eve/lyn's fear seems justified: captured, taken back to Beulah, (s)he would be turned into a perfect Madonna via "an extended course of surgery that would not leave the brain intact this time" (82). Like in other stages of this grotesque passion, the Madonna, embodying the essence of femininity, does not think, she only suffers.

The patriarchal myth of femininity as an Enigma, oscillating between icons of Virgin and Mother, *Femme Fatale* and Masochistic Martyr—emblematized by the bleeding scar in celestial limelight, the haunting paradox and the secret behind seven veils (6) of femininity—shall only be duly acted out by the transvestite movie star, Tristessa. (S)he incarnates the mysteriously perfect woman by turning himself into "the shrine of his own desires, [by making] of himself the only woman he could have loved" (129). As Tristessa's desires keep their "ineradicable quality of his maleness" (173), the ideal woman (s)he sado-masochistically carves on his/her own body is invariably marked by a suffering, passive femininity in a negative mode, characterized by a "beautiful absence of being" (72, 137). Tristessa is no more than a screen to project destructive male desires upon, a mirror reflecting masculine traumatic experiences of the Lacanian primal loss, the Freudian castration anxiety and death drive,[47] and mirroring the "desolation of America, all estrangement, our loneliness, our abandonment" (121). (S)he is a "pane [or pain] the [symbolically masculine] sun shines [aggressively] through" (137), a receptacle engulfing everything and nothing in her abyss, an illusion in a void, an empty hole, the negative "focus of pain" (122). Tristessa's enigmatic image is an intertextual collage sewn out of fragments of iconic women in passionate pain, as Madame Bovary, Catherine Earnshaw, Madeline Usher, Scarlett O'Hara, Juliet, Desdemona, Dido, the Camelia Lady, or Bloody Mary. Their tears assemble her and tear her apart. Tristessa "turns himself into a lucid object, with no ontological only iconographic status" (129), so that (s)he seems omnipresent yet transparent (like her/his glass castle (in)visible throughout the whole novel). Firstly, as an actress, (s)he speaks in Hollywood clichés in these iconic female martyrs' voice. Secondly, his/her fictive autobiography is hidden in undecipherable traces in Eve/lyn's self-fictionalizing retrospective reminiscences constituting the novel. Thirdly, (s)he identifies with his/her appearance, the abstracted essence of femininity to such an extent that

his/her destruction and death fail to provoke mourning or melancholy (not even in his/her greatest admirer, Eve/lyn), as (s)he seems to disperse immaterially in the desert, like a handful of sand. When the impotent Zero and the immature child crusaders—these unmanly characters frustratedly overplaying ther masculinities—learn that they cannot project their real phallic lack on Tristessa, since (s)he is a man merely *acting* as a woman, strangely, instead of castration schemes, all aim at depriving him/her of his/her (faked)femininity. Zero humiliates and torments Tristessa by (cross-)dressing her as a man (a bridegroom), forcing her to copulate as a male with the female Eve (crossdressed as a bride in a violently freakish marriage ceremony), while the children's army shaves her bald and deprives her of her jewels. Yet, (s)he has so much identified with his/her performance-of-femininity-as-suffering that these tortures make him/her even more effeminate. Tristessa dies as a woman, when "revolting to his sinuous principle of femininity" (s)he kisses the leader of child soldiers and is ruthlessly shot on spot. Although, Tristessa's name carries within itself the anagram of Tiresias, and thus the promise of a liberatory gender-bender, yet, as a perfect woman, (s)he realizes only "all the poignancy of hopelessness in its whispering sibilants" (173) to become the allegorical figure of *La Tristesse*, feminine sorrow, the well of sombreness.

iii. Hurting Feminine Landscapes

The construction of patriarchally mythical femininity as victimization is not only painfully carved onto the female flesh, but is also projected on the landscapes of Eve/lyn's picaresque journey. Carter can be regarded as a precursor of feminist geographers,[48] since her fiction undertakes what Elizabeth Grosz calls an analysis of the constitutive and mutually defining relation of bodies and cities, where cities provide a condition and milieu in which corporeality is socially, sexually and discursively produced as a cultural product that reinscribes the urban landscape on its turn (Grosz 1995). *PNE* illustrates Peter Stallybrass' and Allon White's idea elaborated in their *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*: the body cannot be thought separately from the social formation and the constitution of the subject, just as much as it is inseparable from the "socio-symbolic topography." The body is neither a pure natural given, nor merely a textual metaphor, it is a space of cultural corporeal inscriptions, and it is a privileged operator and site for the transcoding of symbolic domains of "psychic forms, the human body, social order, and geographical space" (—whose mappings help in understanding principles of our culture) (Smith 1993, 130). However, although *PNE* reveals the interconnectedness of the ideologically coded body and its surrounding social space, Carter fails to *remap* the engendered body, or *rename* its location, she seems to remain framed within patriarchal spaces. Her fiction rather resembles traditional representation's

stereotypical imagery prevailing in classical texts of patriarchal literary canon, where women are likely to be associated with three-dimensional physical space waiting to be tamed and framed by two-dimensional masculine representation: Mother-Earth to be fecundated by life-giving seeds, land to be conquered and mapped by the male explorer, sea to be sailed with abject mermaids to overcome, *vagina-dentata*-like *grottoesque* cave to be penetrated,[49] incomprehensibly hysteric text to be deciphered, *tabula rasa* to be inscribed with meaning by the phallic pen of the male *auktor* fathering the text.[50]

Instead of providing a feminist geographical revision, Carter repeats the grotesque topography of medieval legends which Bakhtin identifies as a fundamental inspiration of the Rabelaisian carnivalesque grotesque body concept. According to the medieval worldview, the earthly macrocosm is structured exactly like the corporeal microcosm. The excessively ambiguous, irregularly incomplete, vulgarly corporeal grotesque body (contrasting the disciplined, symmetrical, classical body) surfaces in fantastic landscapes, strange geological formations often named after deformed body parts of dismembered supernatural beings (Gargantua's finger, giant's tooth, devil's mouth, hag's back) (Bakhtin 1968, 342).

PNE offers a gendered rewriting of the medieval carnivalesque grotesque topography and anatomy. Yet, instead of the medieval times' cosmic, communal merriment incited by the grotesque body, Carter's dystopia maps out spaces of disillusion. Her fantastic landscapes embody fetishized, freaked and fractured female body parts, abject female corporeal wastefluids, and evoke representations of suffering femininity. The stations in Evelyn's passion (of becoming a woman) trace a topography of pain intertwined with an anatomy of the shattered female body. *PNE* repeats the topography of the ideologically dichotomized subject ((dis)embodied conforming to its gender) that, in Sidonie Smith's words, "locates man's selfhood somewhere between the ears, and women's selfhood between her thighs" (Smith 1993, 12), where the hymen marked by blood, the thin skin 'in-between' destined to be violently disrupted, is identified with the irreducible material core of woman's selfhood.

New York City

Nicoletta Vallorani in her original reading of the novel argues that the undecipherable, chaotic topography of the City (urban landscapes of New York, Beulah and Zero's town) is reflected in the "largely unreadable," fragmented, labyrinthine, postmodernist text, as well as in Tristessa's enigmatically unintelligible body (Vallorani 1998). Although, my study also concentrates on the spatial-, textual-, corporeal- aspects of chaos in *PNE*, unlike Vallorani, I suggest a more overtly gendered reading of landscapes, bodies and narratives. In my view, these are the mutilating myths, contradictory expectations and binding representations of

femininity, painfully (de)composing the female body, which are projected on the chaotic landscapes. The Carterian spaces all embody the fragments of the fetishized and freaked female body that slowly disintegrates to its primordial iconic elements, putrefies to abject fluids of body waste, and in the long run, (de)forms a violently (self)dissolving text of pain.

Although New York City is originally numbered, planned, and ordered on a symmetric grid according to the doctrines of reason, yet in the post-apocalyptic world of the novel it gradually submerges into "chaos, dissolution, nigredo, night" (16). It is irreversibly becoming an alchemical city tainted by a dark and dangerous mythical femininity emblematized by the *vagina dentata*. This New York is not at all the "masculine metropolis" Vallorani claims it to be (Vallorani 1998, 181), but a city marked by the Big Apple, traditional sign of the primal feminine fall, source of all pain. Evelyn (the future Eve) and Leilah (the would-be Lilith)—embodying aspects of the first sinful woman redoubled—meet, unite, and taste the apple here to unchain a chaos that fails to bring illuminating knowledge. New York remains a dark city abounding with images of castration and of the devouring *vagina dentata*. It is the metropolis of a "country where Mouth is King" (10). Its walls are everywhere inscribed with the insignia of angry women, a female circle with a set of bared teeth inside (11, 17, 23). It is peopled by "a special kind of crisp-edged girl with apple-crunching incisors and long, gleaming legs like lascivious scissors" (10), by female sharp-shooters and syphilitic whores "mouthing obscenities" while grabbing balls (13), and practising the humiliation of men and "bruis(ing) machismo [that] takes longer to heal than a broken head" (17). New York City is the home of succubus-like Leilah, who seduces and entraps the fallible Evelyn with the carnivorous flower of her yearning, engulfing, palpitating sex (18), who betrayed, issues voodoo threats against Evelyn's manhood ("she told me a chicken would come and snap my cock of" (32)) and thus, with this prophesy of castration forecasting Eve/lyn's destiny, becomes the 'mouth of truth.'

New York's color is black, as the space of the city is contaminated by the tenebrous depth of the devouring vulva, as well as by the dark matter of body waste of faeces penetrating the putrefying city (a "rich smell of shit add[ing] a final discord to the cacophony of the city's multiple odours" (17)), and by the grumous blood-clots from black Leilah's massive hemorrhage resulting from her painful abortion. In a patriarchal paradox, the iconic *vagina dentata* devours itself, as New York inflicts pain primarily on women. Leilah's black blood soils mark the destruction of the succubus in her and also the abuse of her femininity. Leilah's iconized then denigrated, fetishized then fractured femininity constitutes a terrible memento by violently embracing the surrounding space with the darkness of her blood stains.

Beulah

It is Mother's underground city named Beulah that lends itself the most easily to be identified with a fetishized, abjectified-adulated fragment of the female body, namely the womb. The captured Evelyn slowly discovers his trap, a warm, round, dim room, covered with a soft shiny substance, "lit only by a fringe of pinkish luminescence at the foot of the wall" (49), and filled by a profound silence interrupted only by diminishing murmurs whispering in "a lulling chorus like the distant sound of the sea" a never-ending refrain: "NOW YOU ARE AT THE PLACE OF BIRTH, NOW YOU ARE AT THE PLACE OF BIRTH..." (57). He discovers that this room—as well as Mother's operating theater in the deepest cave where "walls were sealed tight upon us and it was oppressively warm" (57)—is nothing else but a simulacrum of the womb (52). However, instead of a primary, oceanic good vibration of maternal Thalassa, Evelyn feels a metaphysical dread, a panic of being enclosed in a cannibalistic spherical place without doors, of being "swallowed up underground and trapped!" (50)—as if in a grot(to)esque *vagina dentata*. The surgically castrated Evelyn is forced to face the "deepest cave, this focus of all the darkness that had always been waiting for me in a room with just such close, red walls within me" (58) through discovering the "fructifying female space inside" (68). As Aidan Day and David Punter remark, Beulah is a place borrowed from Blakeian mythology, where an ambivalent feminine state allies creativity to destructiveness, beauty to terror in an illusory, emotional emanation that inspires the male artist (Day 1998, 113, Punter 1998, 55). Yet, Eve/lyn's introduction to the "fructifying female space" (53) fails to bring inspiration, illumination, or a revolutionary subversion. The journey back to the source (53) proves to be static. The feminine sphere of the "timeless eternity of inferiority" (53) resembles the female corporeal wastefluids (recycled urine providing drinking water, synthetic pseudo-milk substituting real mother's milk, chemicals in sterile alembics replacing amniotic fluid) which emblematize the city of Beulah in so far as Eve/lyn regards them frightening fossilized myths characterized by a disillusioning dead-end, and a claustrophobic self-sufficiency.

Beulah is submerged in a crimson light in a temperature at constant blood heat (52), so the city's color is blood-red. Yet this abject corporeal fluid, like all of Beulah's interior spaces, seems "unnatural, slippery, ersatz, treacherous, false-looking" (56). Mother's "delivery," Evelyn's castration and Eve's (re)birth must be accompanied by violent floods of blood, and fleshly pain concomitant with femininity. But, as the maternal womb is substituted by the sterile space of the operating theatre, where an artificial surgical intervention merely simulates natural birth, Evelyn strongly doubts the veracity of blood. Operated anaesthetized

(s)he "awakens to a sense of *deadened* pain" (71) and experiences the "crippling pain" of his/her first menstrual flow as simply "the *emblem* of my function" (80) (*my emphasis*). Carved-supplemented with a hollow 'internal absence' of a womb of her/his own, New Eve takes the patriarchally ideal model of suffering femininity to the extreme. (S)he becomes a 'born victim' whose (often melodramatised) womanly torments are always redoubled by the masochist's pain over the lack, the illusory nature of all real pain.

The Desert

The desert draws the topography of the pathologized, mutilated, or wounded female body. It is the abode of "enforced sterility, the dehydrated sea of infertility, the post-menopausal part of the earth" (40), a "scalped, flayed" land, where "the world shines and glistens, reeks and swelters till its skin peels, flakes, cracks, blisters." During the lost Eve/lyn's wanderings in this desert her pains increase: her flesh is burned away, her head is beaten about by the insupportably hot, yellow sun, her skin is lashed by little whips of sand and is aching of pussing, bleeding blisters, her eyes are clogged with dust, her lips are cracking with thirst (47). The desert appears as "a landscape matching the landscape of [her desperate] heart" (41) and of her tormented body. On her picaresque journey Eve/lyn meets the freaked mutilated inhabitants of the desert: Zero's violently deformed, battered wives and the half-breasted, self-dismembering Amazons both represent a savage apprenticeship in 'womanhood' either in traditionally patriarchal or radical feminist utopian ways. The fragmented female body part emblematizing the desert is the wounded breast. Zero's wives all display naked chests covered with bruises and scars, while the Amazons—presumably Beulah's priestesses turned militant feminist sharp-shooters—mutilate themselves to become mono-mammary, moreover the 'new (wo)man,' Tristessa fecundates New Eve/lyn in the desert while softly biting at her right nipple (147). (Interestingly, even the child crusaders of the desert have pierced nipples.) Accordingly, the desert simulates the form of the wounded breast. New Eve and Tristessa "cast [themselves] on the merciless *breast* of this inverted ocean, where only the specks of mica glittered, where [they] should soon die together" (145), whereas Eve/lyn's memories of the desert confirm that: "we were beached on the *breast* of a pearl, so white and swollen did the sand look and then I thought, perhaps we've landed on *one of my own breasts, the left one*" (151) (*my emphasis*). The desert, taking the form of Eve/lyn's *left* breast embodies the symbolically *remaining* pain, the Amazonian mammary mutilation, or her broken heart (175) bruised by becoming woman. The yellow and white desert is marked by corporeal wastefluids of sweat and saliva: the dying transgender lovers heated by their last

disillusioned embrace suck at the water bottle of each others mouth (149) to imagine they are painfully-pleasurably turning into water (153) amidst the dryness of the desert's inverted sea.

The Glass House

Tristessa's transparent glass house filled with mirrors and sculptures of tears perfectly imitates her spectacular performance of femininity based on reflectivity, passivity, and pain. Tristessa turns himself/herself "into an object as lucid as the objects [she] made from glass, and this object was, itself, an idea" (129). (S)he associates woman's being with the absence of being, perpetual vanishing (110), recalling the depthless depth, the passive reflectivity and the deceptive transparency of the looking glass. (S)he negates herself to become "a pane the sun shines through" (137), to "become inviolable, like glass, [that] could only be broken" (137). (S)he aims to transcend the pain of "feminine negativity" exactly by identifying with its essence. Like the looking glass in the "heaped glass hoops of her home" (110) (s)he *reflects* the condensated sufferings of all women, and of (the symbolic, perfectly feminine) Woman. (S)he *mirrors* sorrows of all the world *mimicking* a "receptacle of all the pain[...]*projected* out of[...]hearts upon her *image*" (122). Both her performance of pain and femininity relies on a stylized *repetition* of an *illusory* essence. (S)he lends herself as a screen upon which myths of (dis)illusion may be projected. (S)he becomes a site demonstrating classic and contemporary theories problematizing the mirror image, as a reflection traditionally associated with passive negativity, traumatizing partiality, a tempting yet treacherous mirage, that is conventionally identified with femininity. Tristessa is the living image of the Platonic cave parable's entire shadow show (110), of the Lacanian *mirror stage*'s loss, of Baudrillard's faked spectacle of *simulacrum*, of Irigaray's *speculum of the other woman.*[51] Her view allows for seeing only through a glass, darkly, and not face to face (Corinthians 13:12). (S)he displays fragmented parts instead of a harmonious whole. Her image offered to the possessive, othering male gaze merely gives reflected light (34), mimicks him, while it patriarchally evokes the Lacanian primal painful loss of the entry into the symbolic order shattering the illusory unity in the mirror. Her mirroring reveals reality as reflection, presence as re-presentation, all visible as simulacrum, the seeing-believing-knowing eye/I as consolatory social fiction. Tristessa's performative femininity is constituted as a disillusioning illusion, a disturbingly omnipresent void, an all-embracing nothing, a vessel of emptiness.

Accordingly, her transcendental transparence is architecturally realized on multiple levels in her home —via mirrors reflecting mirrors, reflecting mirrors... Her translucent, luminescent glass house hides her glass coffin in the transparent shrine of the "Hall of Immortals," as well as a clear-watered pool where she trips liquid glass to make her trademark

crystalline sculptures of tears. Lorna Sage calls Tristessa's glass shrine "an omphalos, a navel, a centrifuge" of the picaresque plot (Sage 1994a, 36). Yet, in my reading, her emblematic 'mirror of pain' (de)form a dispersed center, since the chips of her shattered looking glass 'pierce' the narrative, and frame leitmotif-like the painful constructions of femininity. Initially, Leilah ritually incarnates the seductress by abandoning her carnalized self in/to the mirror, "allowing herself to function only as a fiction of the [masculine] erotic dream into which the mirror cast" (30), while the enigmatic object Eve/lyn must face in mother's cave by the ocean, at the end of his 'journey of becoming woman,' is a broken mirror.

Tristessa's glass house is a significant station in Eve/lyn's passion because it models her suffering femininity. The house turned into a glass shrine, resembling a long-abandoned cathedral (113), a mausoleum, or a vault, imitates the cadaverous, ghostly divine Tristessa making of herself a "shrine of his own desires"(128). The serpentine rooms echo her serpentine name and voice, and most importantly, the dancing reflections, shifting perspectives of glass, the vertiginous labyrinth-building evoke the chasms of her depthless, crying eyes. The "reflection in the mirror step[ping] back and the reflection of that reflection in another mirror stepp[ing] back...[in] an endless sequence of reflections" (132) recall her eyes which open to "an endless series of Chinese boxes," to an "infinite plurality of worlds in unguessable depths," disclosing "the abyss of myself, of emptiness, of inward void ...order[ing] me to negate myself with her" (125). Thus, Tristessa's suffering femininity, the crying eyes and the self-reflectively transparent mirrors become emblems of each other in the novel outlining a topography of pain. As Tristessa performs divinations by means of reading tears, it is no wonder that her glass tear sculptures, these "grand transparencies [...]—swollen, tear shaped forms of solid glass with dimples and navels and blind depressions in their sides, the abortions of expressive surfaces" (111) not only embody the painful pathologization ("swollen," "blind," "depression," "abortion"), the libidinal territorialization-fragmentation ("tear," "dimple," "navel") and the othering objectification ("abortions of expressive surfaces") of the female body, but also forecast the humiliating stripping and the final crucifixion of the perfect woman incarnated by Tristessa, which coincides with the demolition of her glass house of mirrors and tears.

The Cave

The last station of Eve/lyn's picaresque journey is a cave by the ocean at the end and the beginning of the world where the hero/ine is led by Leilah-Lilith to meet Mother, whom (s)he leaves behind for good, hoping to find herself on the sea. As Eve/lyn crawls into a fissure in the rock, and painfully pushes herself forward in a narrow stone track towards a cave that

sucks her inwards, she reenacts a reversed birth. Evelyn's pain is the extremely dramatized version of the laboured infant's suffering ("my skin scored and grazed by the cruel embrace of the rock that kneaded my tender nipples unmercifully and bruised and jarred my knees and elbows. My hair snared on little outcroppings[...]every movement necessitated the most extreme exertion" (179) "cut and bruise fingers badly, painful buffeting from inhospitable granite" (182)), yet the cave's pulsating slimy velvet walls, the warm meat passage of the insides of the earth (184), clearly recalling the womb, draw her/him inward. In the cave's sphere, time is turning back on itself, the evolution is reversed, all is dissolving in the amniotic sea, as Eve/lyn is returning to the place of her/his conception. (S)he re-experiences his/her initial being cannibalistically devoured by the *vagina dentata*, the violently embracing maternal womb, castrating *him*, creating *her*, painfully moulding this 'newly born woman' into the 'iron maiden of perfect femininity,'[52] in order to give birth to the new Eve/lyn. Then, as Eve/lyn is expulsed from the cave and is violently thrown up outside onto the green seaside, the devouring lips of the *vagina dentata* transform into a vomiting mouth. The cave embodies the disgorging oral orifice, given that Evelyn climbs into a "*fissure in* the rock *face*" (179), recalling the mouth, and is spitted out by/through "the wide *mouth* of the cave" (186) (*my emphasis*). In the meanwhile, (s)he is being regurgitated amidst abject materia and sensations reminiscent of vomiting: (s)he oozes forward like putrefied cheese in an airless, choked passage, surrounded by a scarcely tolerable stench, a faint reek of rotten eggs, a sulphurated steamlet, and with a sick sudden sensation of falling (180-183) is thrown up (w)retched to the bile green sea. Mother's grotesque cave unites the devouring vagina and the regurgitating mouth into one fissure, and therefore embodies both the highest and lowest fetishized and abjectified cavities of female corporeal topography. The maternal cave fuses beginning and end, and reveals the picaresque journey as a vicious circle, an illusory motion, a static nomadism limited by iconic feminized landscapes of pain. The picaro/picara must learn that reaching the end signifies returning to the point of origin ("I have come home. The destination of all journeys is their beginning. I have not come home" (186)). When Eve/lyn realizes that coming home, finding herself in himself is impossible, Mother never answers, Eve/lyn throws away, into the sea Leilah's present, the mini portable refrigerator containing the set of genitals which had once belonged to Evelyn. Thus, (s)he both renounces of symbolic phallic potential and ceases to believe in mythical matriarchal powers. Although Eve/lyn sails away on the transgender fluid of "maternal ocean," she seems less hopeful than disappointed. (S)he submerges in illusions—in her boat made of mother's coffin exchanged for Leilah's alchemical gold—disillusioned, disinterested, ready to drown.

Eve/lyn's words in the grotesque cavity of the cave can be interpreted as a metatextual and metacorporeal monologue, revealing that her/his 'becoming woman' coincides with her/his coming to writing, her/his 'turning into text,' with both experiences accompanied by an inescapable pain: "The rocks between which I am pressed as between pages of a gigantic book seem to be composed of silence: I am pressed between the leaves of a book of silence. This book has been emphatically closed" (180). At the end of her journey, as during the entire quest for her/his feminine self, Eve/lyn is closed within iconic representations of feminine body associated with pain in patriarchal (his)stories silencing all attempts at female agency. "Death by pressing" signifies a "death by drowning" (181) into representation, a death by patriarchal printing which carves mutilating myths on female corporeality.

The following table illustrates how *PNE* may be read as a narrative that consistently associates fetishized, freaked female body parts, abject female corporeal wastefluids, patriarchal myths of suffering femininity with hurting landscapes and places, and therefore traces a topography of pain intertwined with an anatomy of the shattered female body.

Patriarchal myths, social fictions of femininity	the *Femme Fatale*	the Mother	the Angel in the House	the Enigma (Virgin, Mother, Femme Fatale, Masochistic Martyr)	the Virgin (Mother)
Place	New York	Beulah	Desert	Tristessa's glass house	Cave by the ocean
Iconic, fetishized, freaked female body part	Devouring vagina dentata	Sterile womb	Wound(ed breast)	Crying eyes	Regurgitating Mouth
Abject body waste fluid	Feces	Blood	Sweat	Tears	Vomit
Color	Black	Red	Yellow	Transparent	Green
Pain	Leilah's abortion	Mother's delivery Evelyn's castration Eve's birth	Zero's wives' and Amazons' mutilation	Tristessa's lack of being and humiliation	Eve/lyn's loss

Thus, Carter's feminist project is more than dubious, since she remains trapped within patriarchal representations. Her geography and anatomy repeat the traditional positioning of the subject as a "spatio-temporal being" (Grosz 1995, 85) who (1) is defined marginalized in relation to the centrally positioned Lacanian key-signifier Phallus, (2) is territorialized via its bodily surface fragmented into scientifically located, privileged libidinal zones, and (3) is deprived of its material reality abjectified or fetishized into an 'outside' that is both cannibalistically contained 'within' yet is denied and excluded as an inassimilable 'other'.

Thus, according to a hierarchical, binary logic the space is separated between subject and object, self and other, inside and other, center and margin, masculine and feminine. Although *PNE* as a feminist tract proposes to outline a 'no man's land,' Eve/lyn is abandoned alone in dystopian settings of nowhere which are 'no woman's land' either.

3. A "Feminist Tract About the Social Creation of Femininity" (Carter 1983, 71)

In spite of all the feminine sufferings and painfully grotesque female embodiments revealed in the novel, how can *PNE* be nevertheless intended and interpreted as an "anti-mythic novel[...]conceived as a feminist tract" (Carter 1983, 71)? The fundamental paradox of metafiction is that it has to paraphrase the representations, invoke the ideologies, repeat the very fossilized myths it aims to subvert. I call *corporeagraphic metafiction* writings which undertake to problematize precisely 'from within' this inescapable social-discursive construction and ideological inscription of individually femininized *bodies,* and of collective *corpuses* of canonically marginalized 'women's literature.' To accomplish this, on the one hand, it necessarily replicates the ideologically prescribed, paradoxically dominated and demonized, feminized subjectivity 'written on the female body' by patriarchal technologies of power, and, on the other hand, it retells a narrative according to the traditional codes of "always already engendered" (see Butler 1990) 'feminine' meaning formation and text production, remaining within the frames of stereotypical representations of femininity and stereotypically 'feminine' representations. *PNE* is an outstanding example of corporeagraphic metafiction as it exploits the feminist tactic of 'speaking in quotation marks,' of rehearsing mean, muting and mutilating social fictions of femininity in order to *reveal* them as patriarchally inevitable, yet for a woman utterly unacceptable, and to *unveil* and question the conventional incompatibility of femininity and authoritative subjectivity enabling authorship.

In her *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography*—presumably written simultaneously with and published only one year after *PNE*—Carter applies the same logic, when she calls Marquis de Sade a "moral pornographer" whose seemingly misogynist texts are actually ideology-critical manifestos serving the cause of women's liberation by *unveiling* that "flesh comes to us out of history" (Carter 1978, 11), that sadism, like sexual relations and gender hierarchies, are cultural constructs determined by social contexts, and that femininity-myths are consolatory nonsense, bringing submissiveness and suffering.[53] Carter's suggestion on the "narrative['s being] an argument stated in fictional terms" (Carter 1985, 13) is particularly valid to her fictional works immediately preceding and following her polemical

philosophical piece: both the picaresque of *PNE* and the rewritten fairy-tales of *The Bloody Chamber* aim at fully demystifying the ideologically mythified versions of femininity.

Although many claim that Carter's version of feminism based on repetition—on "putting new wine in old bottles and in some cases old wine in new bottles" (Carter 1983, 76)—is highly problematic, because it remains locked within the infernal traps of phallogocentric imagination's imagery, the regressive circulation of patriarchal metaphors on disabling femininity (seeDuncker 1986, Britzolakis 1997), yet Carter's strategy of 'subversion from within' seems to re-emerge as a recent trend in contemporary feminist thought.

Teresa De Lauretis provides a gender-sensitive re-reading of Foucauldian technologies of power, and reveals the *technologies of gender*: *engendering*, *masculinization*, and *desexualization* (De Lauretis 1987, 1-30) as inevitable patriarchal ideological manipulations. Like Carter, she calls attention to the feminist potentials of an internal re-vision, and encourages women's *recognition of* their *mis*-self-*recognition* in the femininized subject positions and identity-roles offered to them as a series of marginalized minority dispositions devalued by their inherent association with the demonized-dominated corporeality depriving them from subjectivity's agency and authority. The mythic Woman is excluded from the active subject position, yet her embodied difference is necessary for the constitution of the empowered masculine subject who defines himself in an exclusionary, sacrificial logic of negativity *against* the feminine 'other(ed),' this paradoxical *She* caught inside the system (of representation, society) always only as the outside of it. The De Lauretisian argumentation coincides with the Carterian narrative strategy: the repetition of arche-images of patriarchal visual mythology responsible for the cultural constitution of *femininity* reveals the artificial constructedness of gender, and enables women readers to inspect their internalization of the defamiliarized engendering images. De Lauretis argues that the female subject is always schizophrenically addressed both as *a(-)woman* embodying a singular identity in its uncontrollably heterogeneous, even 'un-womanly' bodily reality, and as *Woman* symbolizing the mythified, ideologically universalised-homogenised essential femininity. She encourages women to have a "view from elsewhere," to do critical re-vision, gaining insight to their alternative selves beyond the denaturalized icons of femininity. (De Lauretis 1987, 124)

Therefore, *PNE* can indeed be intended and interpreted as a feminist tract, despite/due to building the narrative on the very "process of physical pain and degradation that Eve undergoes in her apprenticeship as a woman" (Carter 1998, 592), since the text enhances the recognition of misrecognition of the paradoxically positioned feminine subject. Carter's suffering freakish female bodies problematize the *body discipline*, a fundamental Foucauldian

technology of *biopower* (Foucault 1980, 57) that is—according to feminist critics—responsible for the ideologically prescribed deformations of the female body. The painfully feminizing corporeal self-stylizations, ranging from eyebrow-plucking to cosmetic surgery, from dieting and corseting to fatal eating disorders—all fostered by consumer society's beauty industries governed by patriarchal, capitalist hegemony's financial interests—are imposed on women through means of representations which communicate in various spheres of life images of ruthlessly disciplined bodies, women are interpellated to identify with. *PNE* unveils how Western culture's obsessed gaze outlines the female body antagonistically as object of scopophiliac desire and enigmatic empress of life and death, as sublime essence of beauty and abjectified 'other' to identify oneself *against*, as tempting and threatening corporeality associated with a femininity that remains an unresolved paradox. New Eve's passion of becoming woman reveals how Western societies interpellate the female body as simultaneously idealized *and* normativized, decorporealized *and* embodied, aestheticized *and* pathologized, eroticized *and* asceticized, marked by visibility as a real simulacrum in a society of spectacle *and* repressed, silenced, hidden as taboo in a society of *scientia sexualis* (see Foucault 1978). The aim is to disclose the very process how patriarchal technologies of power produce via the impossible expectations of the engendering body discipline freakish female bodies. Readers are faced with the shameful scenario how the ideologically interpellated woman voluntarily carves painful marks of her gender upon her own body by internalizing icons of femininity under the constant, panoptical surveillance of the Eye of the Power (Foucault 1980, 146-166), conforming to the expectations of the given social, cultural, historical era. The stages of New Eve's passion, scenes from demystified myths, represent how Woman's heels or toes are cut off to make her feet fit the prince's shoes, to suit his desires, how Woman is killed into the perfect mirror image where the looking glass speaks up in a male voice to tell "who in this land is the fairest of all," or how Woman is squeezed into the S size pink corset of the normatively ideal Barbie doll, or into 'the iron maiden of beauty myth,' concomitant with the constitution of femininity in Naomi Wolf's view (Wolf 1991).

The epigraph of Carter's novel, "In the beginning all the world was America," a line from Locke, proves to be prophetic, as the United States of America is indeed marked by the freakish female body that proves to be prescriptive throughout the Western construction of femininity. Reality imitates fiction, contemporary United States seems to model the Carterian post-apocalyptic world, as it turns into a hotbed of the female grotesque, by being home of the anatomically deformed Barbie doll, the excessively skinny anorexic, or the abnormally obese fast food junkie, of steroidized female body builders with muscle dysmorphia, of plastic

surgery-addicts, of hypertechnological net-surfing cyborgs, of maniacally stylized and designed, tattooed, pierced, dyed, shaved, 'made-up' freakedly feminine bodies.[54] (see Kérchy 2005d) This ever-expanding spectacular society of simulacrum 'hatching' unrealistic, un/superhuman freakish bodies elicits the symptoms of *body image disturbance*—a misconceived image of the self resulting in ascetically 'self-mutilating,' corporeal deformations performed on oneself—a new form of female malady (succeeding to hysteria and depression) that nevertheless can be interpreted as a manifestation of dis-ease, and as such, a mode of radical transgression. Accordingly, there are two sides of the same coin, with contradictory interpretations of the 'terrorist' corporeal distortions of femininity. Carterian and current U.S. freakish body modifications may be read as body-controlling manipulations of the dominant patriarchal ideology's *technologies of biopower*, influenced by the economic interests of consumer society's major business fields targeting women in the form of beauty industries (diet, fitness, cosmetics, plastic surgery, etc.), to 'colonize,' to 'yoke'' female bodies driven to (psycho)somatic disorders (see Bordo 1993). Yet, on the other hand, they might also signify (dubious yet) innovative *technologies of the self*, (re)writing the body as a mode of feminist empowerment, to create a subversive anti-aesthetic carved onto one's very flesh. It is up to the reader to decide whether these female self-freakings are desperate and futile attempts at the carnivalesque destabilization of the conventional, hierarchical social order and of traditional ways of seeing, enacted by victims trapped in the inevitable scenario of the ideology of representation; or on the contrary, they are self-reflexive, ideology-critical subversions of warriorwomen rewriting myths of 'American beauty' and femininity via performative identities and metamorphic selves self-re-made in monstrous metatexts.

Numerous primary textual evidences prove that, despite its dwelling in images of freakish embodiments of suffering femininity, *PNE* lends itself to be interpreted as an internally subversive "feminist manifesto" enabling the recognition of 'mis-self-recognition' via a relentless ideology-criticism. The novel is structured as a retrospective autobiographical narrative, in which the masculine Evelyn looking at women is already from the very beginnings looked at by the 'feminized' Eve looking back on him(self). No matter how misogynist, male chauvinistic the narrative and its images seem to turn, it is always easy to detect an ironic woman's voice complementing the macho confessions. The sadistic Evelyn calls himself a "tender little milk-fed English lamb" (9), he escapes New York "like a true American hero, [his] money stored between [his] legs" (37). Mother's self-created god-head is "as big and as black as Marx's head in Highgate Cemetary" (59), while her two tiers of divine breasts recall a "patchwork quilt," "bobbles on the fringe of an old-fashioned, red

curtain at a French window open on a storm," and the "console of a gigantic cinema organ" (60,64,65). The captured Evelyn ceremoniously exclaims: "Oh, the dreadful symbolism of that knife! To be castrated with a phallic symbol!" (70), and is turned via the ritual surgery into a "Playboy center fold" (75). The lowly Zero enacts the Nietzschian *Übermensch* amidst the disgusting dirt of his pigs. The child crusaders claim to be the scourge of God in shrill, sweet, infantile voices. Tristessa forms "the *uroborus*, the perfect circle, the vicious circle, the dead end" by having "his cock stuck in his asshole" (173). The masculine entity of the ocean is called a "mother of mysteries" (191). The ironic, feminist Eve's ventriloquist voice within Evelyn's macho confessions is certainly powerful enough to make readers smile.[55]

Yet, "defeating every pornographic expectations from male readers" (Ward Jouve 1994, 142), defamiliarizing the phallogocentric imagery and destabilizing the patriarchal narrative still does not render the novel fully comic, celebratory or satisfying for feminist readers. In my view, the reader can never forget about the actual female suffering's direct material consequences involved in the text. Nevertheless, as I have pointed out, despite it sado-masochistic tendencies, critics tend to praise Carter's self-conscious feminist project. Lorna Sage convincingly claims that Carter's story of the "woman born out of a man's body" reflects the woman-writer's hardships of 'coming out' as a feminist, and also provides a more general "allegory of the painful process by which the 1970s women's movement had to carve out its own identity from the unisex mould of 1960s radical politics" (Sage 1994a, 35). But does *PNE*'s writer really succeed in leaving her "male impersonator" self behind, can she carve out an own feminist identity from the unisex mould, and is her feminist manifesto's political project truly that self-consciously structured and reassuringly coherent?

My aim in the followings is to prove, that in *PNE* the narrative enacts the principal paradox of ironic metafiction, and the "transgressive reinscription" (Dollimore 1991, 33) of the internally subversive, "demythologizing" feminism it applies. Having it both ways, like the 'subversion from within the system to be subverted,' signifies an uncertainty, a vertiginous balancing in the void of nowhere without location, safety or stakes—leading to painful disillusion. Instead of exploiting the playfully celebratory potential of polysemy and polyphony, the numerous contradictory narrative voices seem to tear the text apart in a chaos where the dissolution of the shattered narrative reflects semioticized the explosion of hurting feminine landscapes and the painful fragmentation-decomposition of freakish female bodies.

4. A Post-operative Transsexual Autobiography. A Transgender Narrative?

Heather L. Johnson's original reading of the novel argues that the surgically sex-changed Eve/lyn's retrospective autobiographical reminiscences highly resemble non-fictional accounts of transgender experience. The common characteristic features of post-operative transsexual autobiographies and of Eve/lyn's narrative, enumerated by Johnson, include the (re)construction of gendered identity as a performance, and the questioning of the gender status of the 'I' in the text due to the collision between the pre- and post-operative states. According to Johnson, the post-operative antagonism between the new female appearance and the old male sense of self results on the level of the narrative of the self in an identification with drag queens, a fetishization of one's own body, and an overplayed effeminate transvestite style. In the long run, this either contributes to the endorsement of the normatively hierarchical gender relations, or on the contrary, to the camp re-reading of heterosexual physicality in a parodic narrative style, deferring seriously fixed statements on self and sex, and underscoring issues of gender artifice. Despite these ambiguous narrative potentials outlined, Johnson comfortably concludes her article by celebrating the birth of a transgender being within multiply gendered narratives of post-operative transsexual autobiographies and Carter's fictional New Eve/lyn's reminiscences alike. Johnson quotes Sandy Stone's post-transsexual manifesto on the enabling theoretical opportunities afforded by the transsexual body to claim that "in the transsexual as text we may find the potential to map the refigured body onto conventional gender discourse and thereby disrupt it, to take advantage of the dissonances created by such a juxtaposition to fragment and reconstitute the elements of gender in new and unexpected geometries" (Johnson 1997, 176, Stone 1991, 296)

From a feminist perspective, I find problematic not only the ambiguous textual potential (resulting from the ironic style of the internally subversive feminist demythologizations), but also Stone's very definition the transsexual body/text, built on the unbalanced base of "dissonance," "disruption" and "fragmentation." Similarly, when Johnson underlines the transgressive symbols of the text shaping the gender-bending transsexual subject, she fails to remark that Tristessa's "pool of gender fluidity" is a pool of glass *tears*, that the "parodic waxwork figures" are cruelly dismembered puppets, and that the "transgender hermaphroditic union in the desert" is a desperate and futile attempt at survival, a last instinctive enactment of the Freudian pleasure-drive—and that all these celebrated "fluid images" of transsexual transgression are icons associated with pain. (Johnson 1997, 176)

Although Eve/lyn's narrative questions the gender identity of the autobiographically narrated self, and reflects post-operative antagonisms, in my reading, the pluri-gendered

narrative of this fictional transsexualized subject never succeeds in providing a trimphantly feminist (sub)version of prevailing gender dichotomies and narrative frames. Instead of offering alternatives through a liberatory polyphony of harmoniously complementary or interchangeable voices, Carter's piece of transgender literature[56] remains stuck within a textual/sexual chaos. A cacophonic duo of dissonant voices from the radically stereotypized gender poles, the extremely effeminate transvestite's and the ineradicably masculinist cross-dresser's narrative voices constantly interrupt, violate, or abort each other within Eve/lyn's narrative, painfully shattered into pieces. Although Johnson claims that Tristessa's transvestite narrative is a "lost history" engulfed by the "fully declared presence" of Eve/lyn's transsexual autobiography constituting the novel (Johnson 1997, 175), I think that none of the voices is guaranteed a "fully declared presence" in the text, since the over-effeminate transvestite voice decisively re- and re-emerges to 'infect,' to erase and replace the hyper-masculinist cross-dresser's narrative, and to be annihilated, violently overwritten on its turn.

Eve/lyn's reminiscences tinted with machismo are repetitively turned into a Tristessian "symbolic autobiography in arabesques of kitsch and hyperbole" (5), filled with "her incomparable tears and every kitsch excess of the mode of femininity" (71), an over effeminate transvestite narrative characterized by uncertainty and illusions ("That night I stayed in a hotel that caught fire in the early hours of the morning—or, rather seemed to have caught fire, for there was all the appearance of fire." (11)), emotionality and histrionic sentimentality ("Tristessa. Enigma. Illusion. Woman? Ah!" (6)), catachretic illogic and hyperbolic excess (illustrated by the over-accumulation of metaphors in epitaphs: Leilah is fox, bird, racehorse, nymph, siren and succubus (18-27), Mother is Kali, Maria, Aphrodite, Jocasta, Danae, Alphito, Demeter, while Tristessa is Madeline Usher, Carmen, Juilet, Dido, Lazarus and Ezekiel among others). The engendered concept of this mock-*écriture féminine* is symbolized by Tristessa's writing/reading in glass tears ("I can read tears. They map our destiny when they flow down the face. I perform divinations by means of tears, I let my glass flow the same way, at random, in sorrow. I let the glass form the pattern of my tears and then I consult the augury and make my own memorials" (143)).

Just like Tristessa's glass tears are ruthlessly crashed into pieces by the hyper-masculine, misogynist Zero penetrating her glass house to destroy it, similarily the recurring, ineradicably masculine cross-dresser's voice shatters the over-effeminate narrative voice. The male impersonator in the femininized writing self, Evelyn in New Eve is never fully eliminated from the narrative. As I demonstrated, the text constantly enacts the construction of femininity as victimization of women and finds the sadistic pleasure of the male gaze

(even) in the extreme chaos of her (own) dissolution ("the plastic surgery that turned me into my own diminutive, Eve, the shortened form of Evelyn[...]I had become my own masturbatory fantasy[...]the cock in my head, still, twitched at the sight of myself" (75)). The narrative voice oftentimes turns rational, objective ("as I fled the Woman's Town, I felt myself almost a hero, almost Evelyn again, in my arrogant and still unaltered heart, I remained irrationally convinced I could escape them by a sheer effort of will" (82)). Eve/lyn's voice is distanced, unmoved, even disinterested ("I felt a sense of grateful detachment from this degradation, I registered in my mind only the poignant fact of my second rape in two hours: "Poor Eve! She's being screwed again!" (91)). The narrator is aware that in this didactic picaresque a passive hero goes through the stages of his/her passion for the instruction of the readers, yet in the end may only return to the origins as a disillusioned (she)man, (still) dreaming of destroyed, decomposing, vanishing femininities (and masculinities) ("dreaming of[...]Tristessa's[...] hall of mirrors[...]smashed, [...]he with the fatal red hole in his breast, [...]vanishes when I open my eyes" (191)).

The dissonant duo of the multiply gendered narrative voices illustrates the contemporary Anglo-American feminist literary theoretical consensus interpreting women's writing as a double-voiced discourse, a polyphonic or palimpsestic text that inherently incorporates both the dominant, canon-shaping, patriarchal and the contained, silenced, 'feminine' social-, literary-, and cultural heritage. (Gilbert-Gubar 1979, Lanser 1991, 617, Showalter 1985, 439).

The gender status of the 'I' is doubly destabilized in the text, as the post-operative transsexual autobiographical writing subject's gender-trouble is echoed in the 'natural-born' transvestite's incorporated narrative of the self. Both Eve/lyn' s and Tristessa's intensive narrative destabilization of the gendered (auto)biographical self daringly switches between "woman," "man," "she," "he," until both of them arrive to "it" a distanced third person pronoun, that strangely seems adequate to define the confusingly de-, re- and de-gendered selves. 'It,' as a personal pronoun, is associated with an alienated thing,[57] an empty sign, a nothing that provokes a feeling of dissolution, confusion, regret and painful loss, instead of triumphantly liberatory 'selves-consciousness' generated by the availability of multiple identity-, gender-, narrative categories.

> ...like a drowning *man*...I was again the *child* whose dreams she had invaded and also the *young man* for whom she had become the essence of nostalgia and yet I remained *the thing I was*, a *young woman*, New Eve, whose sensibility had been impregnated with that of Tristessa during the insomniac nights of transmutation in the desert. *New Eve* looked down, in an ecstasy of regret, at this *sign* of love made flesh... (118-119)

> I crept up to *him* and kissed *her* pitiful, bare feet with *their* fine ankles and high ballerina's arches. I could not think of *him* as a man, my confusion was perfect—as perfect as the exemplary confusion of the proud solitary *heroine* who now underwent the unimaginable ordeal of a confrontation with the essential aspect of *its* being *it* had so grandly abandoned, the implicit *maleness it* had never been able to assimilate into *itself.* (128)[58] *(my emphasis)*

The narrative is decomposed by contrarily gendered voices merely to reflect a nervously narrated neurotic, 'neither/nor' body, tormented by a gradual disembodiment—a disinterested alienation from one's own body—resulting from the 'perpetual vanishing' of solid subjectivity. (This painful process is underlined by Eve/lyn's self-reflexive comments: "something in me rang false" (106), "my new flesh momentarily betrayed me," "even my memories no longer fitted me" (92), and the pretence of a femininizing self "[that] kept me in a state of permanent exhaustion" (101).) In my interpretation, instead of playfully polyphonic narrative potentials and self-consciously troubled gender identities, both the transsexual New Eve and the transvestite Tristessa yearn for an autonomous female identity, a safely self-sufficient, enabling feminine self that remains forever unattainable for both of them. This is explains why the post-operative Eve/lyn declares disillusioned: "I know nothing. I am a tabula rasa, a blank sheet of paper, an unhatched egg. I have not yet become a woman, although I possess a woman's shape. Not a woman, no: both more and less than a real woman" (83).

The dissonant duos of Eve/lyn and Tristessa, of the ineradicably masculine, male-to-female, post-operative transsexual and the essentially over-effeminate, male transvestite, of Evelyn and New Eve, binary poles of stereotypical machismo and mystified femininity, of the male impersonating and militantly feminist writerly selves never incite a cathartically joyous explosion in/of the text, but rather contribute to a painful disintegration of the narrative. The sudden gender-bending switches of the self-fictionalizing autobiographical voice enact a madwoman's hysteric convulsions and nervous contractions (neurotic tics, spasms of retching, annoying itchings' involuntary scratchings) combined with a male hypochondriac's stuttering, compulsive over-verbalization. All in all, these inflections of gender and narrative seem to me much more pathologically painful than playful. (Interestingly, the attentive reader discovers that the nervous narrative-spasms accompanying the sudden gender-switches also emerge on a thematic level: Eve/lyn performs sudden violent movements at crucial points of his/her identity's destabilization. Eve/lyn officially becomes Mrs. Zero when (s)he *catches* in a cricketer's catch Zero's wedding ring *threwn* at him/her, and is *swept* back to his boyhood memories (92). (S)he begins to behave too much like a woman precisely while (s)he makes *sudden* masculine *gestures*, and *exclaims* with a telling male inflection (101). (S)he is turned

into a Playboy centerfold with a cock in his head that still *twitches* at the sight of herself (75), and (s)he is more of a man than Zero while being the perfect Venus herself just *risen* from surgery (107).) Characteristically, these textual-, sexual- stumbles are associated with the experience of suffering: when Eve/lyn is raped by Zero his outcry of altruistic masculine heroism suddenly switches into her desperate moan of defenseless, humiliated femininity: "I began to cry, to drown the noise they [masturbating wives] were making and spare them a beating./ No. I'm lying. I cried because of the pain he caused me, my renewed eyes seemed to have been made of water, since often they would leak" (107). Despite the inventive narrative-, and identity-performances the suffering stays the same, as the textual twist enact the tremble of the body in pain.

Even the episodes most widely celebrated for overturning limiting narratives of engendered identity end up in pain, usually inflicted on women. At the peak of gender trouble, Eve/lyn and Tristessa perform a freakish parody of a wedding ceremony. The originally male, masculine Evelyn, surgically transformed into hyper-feminine Eve, is cross-dressed as a bridegroom, and thus becomes "a boy disguised as a girl and now disguised as a boy again" (132), who under the masculine mask wears another, irremovable mask of femininity hiding his authentic maleness. The transvestite Tristessa—whose performance of femininity as a cross-dresser's disguise becomes her nature—is stripped of the accessories of his faked femininity, to be exposed as biologically male, and, adding one more twist to gender bender, he is dressed in the drag of a bride. Both (de-, re-)gendered, (un)masked partners fuse bride and groom into one in a multiple *mise-an-abyme*, and destabilize identities via the confusion of personal pronouns, evolving from "he," "she," to "it," and "we." Yet, their subversive 'gender trouble' takes place with the mad poet Zero pointing his gun at them, "*forc*[*ing* them] out of the selves into which [they] had been born," *forcing* them to enter the realm of negation, to become echoes of clichés, copies of spectacular fictions (136), disembodying no-bodies. The forced marriage is followed by Eve/lyn's and Tristessa's coerced, unpleasurable copulation, a 'double rape' directed by the revengeful Zero, who cruelly humiliates and violates both of the newly weds. The bound Tristessa and the sodomized Eve/lyn, these broken and bleeding bodies, these lost beings definitely do not evoke the celebratory, liberatory subversive potential of the multiply gendered being.

The corporeal union of the pluri-gendered beings is repeated in the desert where the gender-bending identity-subversion is fully accomplished by turning the lovers, he/she and she/he into "we," Tiresias (146), a self-sufficient androgynous *Uroborus* snake biting in its own tail, "the great Platonic hermaphrodite...the whole and perfect being ...who stops time in

the self-created eternity of lovers" (148). Despite Eve/lyn's enthusiastic retrospective celebration of their idyllic union (in one single passionate sentence of 15 lines![59]), I disagree with Harriet Blodgett who calls this sexual act the "first experience of true, erotic love" (Blodgett 1994, 51). I also refute Heather Johnson who exalts the sexual congress between the two hermaphroditic figures as a climactic dissolution of identity, overcoming repression, celebrating the transgression of gender binaries and revealing the body as an unlimited site of pleasure (Johnson 1994, 47). I find much more convincing David Punter's argument suggesting that the "lifeless mating" and "premature ejaculation" of Eve/lyn and Tristessa is an instant eruption of libidinal instinct so small and unsatisfactory that it only confirms the boundary between genders, the incompatibility of desires and the divided nature of the self. (Punter 1998, 57) For me, this fusion of multiply gendered bodies reinforces—instead of the immaculate harmony of the Platonic hermaphroditic union—the inevitable fragmentation of the heterogeneous subject, while the evocation of self-sufficient androgyny implies the insupportable sorrow of the autonomous self doomed to disruption. Eve/lyn and Tristessa are like Balzac's Zambinella or Foucault's Herculine Barbin,[60] whose fractured hybrid bodies signify impossibility, madness or melancholy exactly via embodying the disruptive potential shattering the homogenised, engendered, interpellated subject. Despite Johnson's proposition, the transgendered self remains impossible. 'Either-or' ('feminine' versus 'masculine') gender dichotomies are confused only to produce 'neither/nor' no-bodies, disillusioned no-ones painfully disintegrating the text. The heteronormative reproductive economy is not overturned, since New Eve is fecundated, and at the end leaves the text pregnant, sailing towards the place of birth. The conventionally hierarchical sexual-social scenario is reinforced, as feminine sexuality is associated with subordination and suffering even in the Platonic perfect fusion. In the desert love-scene, New Eve's newly gained female erotic *jouissance* introduces her to a loss of her own body, "now defined solely by his," and initiates her to the realm of pain as his kisses explode like tracer bullets along her arms, taking her to Golgotha (149). Moreover, even the gender-bender moment of orgasm continues the crucifixion of the femininity in both of the partners, and redoubles female torture by smashing the woman in Tristessa and Eve/lyn alike: "I beat down upon you mercilessly, with atavistic relish, but the glass woman I saw beneath me smashed under my passion and the splinters scattered and recomposed themselves into a man who overwhelmed me" (149). The corporeal union in the desert does not bring illumination, merely uncertainty, insatiable yearning and dissatisfaction, ending in a slow mummification into an iconic embrace, turning the pluri-gendered lovers into no-one and nothing (150-151).

Quite tellingly, even the critics unanimously praising the transgender potentials of the Carterian textuality and corporeality have their slips of the tongue revealing their hesitancy concerning the violence of these subversions. Alison Lee calls the narrative voice a "*site of conflict and confusion*," and quotes Susan Rubin Suleiman claiming that "Carter multiplies the possibilities of linear narrative and of 'story,' producing a *dizzying accumulation* that undermines the narrative logic by its very excessiveness" (Lee 1997, 80). Nicoletta Vallorani suggests that Carter's fictional space is a space of "*primordial chaos*" composed of "elements [...] summed up in sequence with *no understandable links*" (Vallorani 1998, 180). According to Sarah Gamble the troubling open-ending of the narrative leaves Eve/lyn "*hesitating* between the *risk* offered by the acquisition of the new knowledge and the *dubious security* of the obedience to the old" (Gamble 1997, 129). Lindsay Tucker thinks that the Carterian body enacts "*truly indeterminate and fluctuating directions* of gender construction" (Tucker 1998, 11). Heather L. Johnson admits that the emphasised textuality of the gender-bending figure highlights a "*significant tension*" between its subjective autobiographical narrative and its theoretization as a screen onto which we map "*ongoing struggles* for comprehension about gender identity" (Johnson 1997, 166). Interestingly, even Carter herself, in a letter addressed to Elaine Jordan, calls *PNE* her "favourite of novels because it is so ambitious, so serious and *so helplessly flawed*" (Jordan 1994, 213). (*my emphasis*)

Thus, even the criticism celebrating the feminist potentials of Carter's novel reinforces my initial presupposition, that the proliferation of antagonistically gendered narrative voices (de)composes *PNE* as a distressing site of corporeal and textual conflict. The self-decomposing narrative's un-/re-writing process models the sadistic-fetishistic disintegration of dissolving female bodies and fragmenting feminized landscapes. Like Carter's succeeding novels, *PNE* exploits the postmodernist subversive potentials of dynamic polyphony, heterogeneous intertextuality, challenged subjectivity and semiosis in crisis, yet her subject is literally put on trial, while her meanings-in-process[61] bring suffering instead of celebration. The moment of the discursively constituted, embodied subject's destabilisation results in an uncertain feeling of self-alienating emptiness predominating over the deconstruable identity's empowering potential. The polyphony of New Eve/lyn's passionate narrative reflects a 'pain in the text' and a 'text in pain,' as the 'self-crucifying' text is (dis)organized by nervous bodies' sufferings.

In the followings, I reveal that the Carterian 'transgender' oscillation between 'feminine' and 'masculine' voices enacts semioticized the pathological symptoms of *body dysmorphia*, a contemporary 'female malady,' concomitant with social (de)formations of femininity, producing a fatally false image of the self, resulting in cruel, self-induced corporeal torments.

5. Narrating a Nervous Bulimic Body-Text. A Pathologically Polyphonic Text Semioticizing Female Body Dysmorphia[62]

As I demonstrated, *PNE* enacts the construction of femininity as the victimization of women. It recalls the sufferings inflicted on the feminized subject by the ideological *technologies of gender* (De Lauretis 1987) surfacing in violent body disciplines which carve contradictory expectations of the patriarchally mythified 'normative ideals' upon the female body that constitutes the locus of *her* subjectivity. Paradoxically, in our post-industrialist, capitalist, consumer cultures of mass production and over-abundance, the excessively eroticized, hedonistic, voracious female corporeality is simultaneously associated with cruelly asceticized, diminished feminine bodies, rendered 'docile' by the normalizing disciplines of diet-, fitness-, cosmetic-, fashion-, plastic surgical-, pornographic- and beauty industries. As Naomi Wolf and Susan Bordo, among other materialist feminist theoreticians stress, beauty industries reinforce the social fiction of submissive femininity by prescribing painful bodily modifications for women in need of 'taming.' Binding waists, pushing up breasts, waxing legs, plucking eyebrows, cleaning spots, dyeing hair-roots, deodorizing shaved underarms, re- and re-painting faces, or fasting, surgically manipulating, and working-out the female body serve to control its shape, weight, size, looks and materiality. This over-all body management guarantees women's habituation to external regulation, subjection and transformation, and assures their interiorization of the need for 'self-improvement' and self-discipline in the service of the patriarchally defined norm. As Bordo claims, "memorizing on our bodies the feel and conviction of lack, insufficiency, of never being good enough, [via] practices of femininity [...]may lead us at the farthest extremes to utter demoralization, debilitation, and death" (Bordo 1993, 166). In my view, *PNE* is an extraordinary text, since its self-contradictory narrative voices express the direct material consequences of the painful social de-formation of femininity. Via enacting the psychosomatic symptoms of the neuroticized second sex^{text}, female body dysmorphia is semioticized to narrate a nervous, bulimic body-text.

i. Distorted Bodies, Vacillating Subjectivities

Female body dysmorphia, also known as *body image distortion syndrome* (*BIDS*) surfaces in symptoms of eating disorders of psychosomatic illnesses as anorexia- and bulimia nervosa. This psychosis, dangerously inflicting corporeality, usually appears in young female patients seriously frustrated by social expectations of femininity associated with slimness and eternal beauty. The patient, unable to conceive her body image objectively, tormented by unrealistic phantasmagorias of her irreducibly obese corporeality, either (like the anorexic) utterly rejects eating, or (like the bulimic) feels a compulsion to over-eat elicited by obsessive

thoughts about the desired food that paradoxically also provokes an psychic disgust in her. She becomes an addict of 'binge and purge,' a compulsive devouring and disgorging of food, a recurring over-eating followed by (spontaneously or consciously produced) vomiting or diarrhea, which result in fatal digestive disorders, a drastic loss of weight at accelerated speed, and may even lead to death. (Interestingly, Carter, as a teenager at odds with the social, corporeal expectations of femininity, had suffered from anorexia nervosa (Sage 1994a, 24).[63])

Relying on Helen M. Malson's and Susan Bordo's [64] descriptions of the disease, I would like to argue, that the major characteristic of the *anorexic*, and particularly the alternatively devouring *and* disgorging *bulimic* patient is a painful oscillation between the binary gender (op)positions. (1) On the one hand, drastically influenced by the patriarchal 'beauty myth,' she *over-internalizes* the traditional masculine ideal of slender, suffering *femininity*. On the other hand, she wishes to compensate for her lack of status and power in society, to gain empowerment, by *becoming masculinized*, synonymous with the agency of autonomous subjectivity. Hers is a triumph of the *masculinized* mind and the will over the ruthlessly controlled, *femininized* body. (2) On the one hand, her disgust of disorderly fat, of erupting stomach, unwanted protuberances and excess flesh signals her *disgust of traditional femininity* confined to domestic sphere and maternal nurturing (emblematized by the kitchen). Her self-starvation and self-purifying vomiting mark *attempts to disappear as feminine excess*, to reach a complete disembodiment, a *dematerialization of* the threatening and traditionally over-eroticized *feminine body*. The ceasing of female corporeal functions as menstruation, and the appearance of masculine bodily attributes as facial hair is often heralded as a *triumph of masculine self-management, eliminating the pathological, fragile, emotional aspects of femininity,* and gaining complete mastery of the self. Ironically, in the meanwhile, she *embodies exaggerated stereotypical feminine traits* in an unlimited excess, and becomes a caricature of the standardized visual image of the normative feminine hyper-slenderness, "a virtual, though tragic parody of 20th century constructions of femininity" (Bordo 1993, 170, Malson 233-239). (3) On the one hand, the patient obsessively *incorporates the stereotype of femininity as physical and emotional nurturer of others*. She develops a totally other-oriented emotional economy, suppresses her own desires for self-nurturance, hunger, or independence, and considers self-feeding as greedy and perversively excessive. On the other hand, her compulsive over-eating marks her female hunger for public power, independence, sexual gratification, and autonomous will. Her insatiable voracity, her unrestrained consumption *stages exactly the stereotypically uncontrollable female excess*, uncontained desire, combined with all-wanting determination, and unbound free will.

The bulimic's traumatic vacillation between compulsive over-eating and purifying vomiting, between insatiable appetite and ascetic self-starvation, between bingeing and purging, devouring and disgorging marks the paradoxically positioned feminine subject's vertiginous oscillation between the socially available gender positions, between the ideologically prescribed, passive or excessive, hyper-corporeal femininities and the inherently masculinized, autonomous, self-mastering, disembodied subjectivity.

ii. Cannibalistic Discourses, Dissonant Voices

This pathological oscillation of the engendered 'subject in crisis,' enacted by the bulimic body is ingeniously semioticized in the Carterian narrative via the contradictory narrative voices, the stereotypically 'feminine' or 'masculine' discourses disharmoniously disagreeing with each other in the cacophonic transsexual narrative. *PNE* is a chaotic collage (con)fusing a male impersonating autobiografiction's and a feminist manifesto's antagonistic palimpsest, with an ineradicably masculinist cross-dresser's and an extremely effeminate transvestite's dissonant duo, as well as with 'madwomanly' convulsive narrative-flows' and male hypochondriac stuttering over-verbalizations' strange narrative duality. The troubling (de)composition of the pathologically polyphonic, 'schizoid' text seems to be aggravated by the random mixture of different genres and styles (combining Hollywood-style mythomania [obsessed with *grandes dames*] with postmodern demythologization [motivated by deadened (male)authors], mixing 'feminine' genres as romance, fairy-tale or *Bildungsroman*, with 'masculine' genres as pornography, science-fiction, picaresque or autobiography). Cross-gender discourses of contradictory narrative voices violently 'castrate' and 'abort' each other in a shattered narrative that models the insolvable conflict of nervous feminine subjectivity, and the bulimic body's painful self-dissolution. The clashing voices' semioticization of this 'cannibalistic devouring and disgorging' stages dramatised ideological technologies' double attempts to incorporate, to contain and to expulse the threatening 'otherness' of corporeality.

iii. Bulimic imagery

On a thematic level, the reader affronts a *bulimic imagery* that reinforces the irritating fluctuation of the multiply gendered antagonistic narrative voice, and reflects the debilitating, destructive effects of the corporeally *objectified* feminine *subject*'s social constitution. As I revealed, the devouring-disgorging mouth of the *vagina dentata* opens up gaping in New York city to 'consume' the autobiographical subject and initiate Eve/lyn's story, and at the end re-opens in Mother's cave by the sea-side to 'regurgitate' her/him, disillusioned, vomited back to the point of origin, where gender trouble remains unresolved.

Hyper-feminine corporealities are identified via the accumulation of culinary metaphors and similees with delicacies, "sweet sins" luring to be consumed, cannibalistically devoured yet difficult to digest, being the peak of temptation, gratification *and* remorse and pain for bulimics, leading to the binge and purge characterizing the 'female malady.' Leilah is linked to the hash candies, pink milkshakes, Baby Ruth, and Americana lollipops she sucks on, while New Eve's flesh resembles ripe peach, and her naked body forms a gingerbread-woman invitingly calling "Eat me!" (148). As for Tristessa, her iconic favorite is raspberry ice-cream, her fingers recall canned asparagus, and in Sarah Sceats's view, feeding on pills, s/he embodies the literally empty anorexic, an insatiable monster with a "masculine negative hollowness threatening with implosion" (Sceats 1997, 108). Moreover, the most telling combinations of gluttonous, gourmand culinary pleasures and of disgusted regurgitations, threatening disgorgings associated with the painful enactment of the ruthless myth of femininity are projected upon Tristessa's enigmatic figure that is marked by "the *blood caked* at the corners of her mouth" (130) (*my emphasis*).

On the cathartic meetings with Tristessa, crucial moments of the narrative, Eve/lyn repeatedly recalls a childhood memory of an ambiguous 'gustatory adventure' melting oral gratification and displeasure. The memory, constituting an antagonistic fusion of gastronomic-, psychic-, and physical pleasure and pain, is linked to Queen of Sorrow Tristessa's hyper-feminine performance of suffering, satisfying aggressive (scopophiliac, sadistic, cannibalistic) 'macho-masculine' appetites. The unforgettable gustatory experience combines engendered complementaries of wanting and dissatisfaction to provoke 'transsexual,''cross-gender' bulimic bodily reactions, oscillating between hunger and repulsion, devouring and disgorging, being devoured and disgorged, excessive/ascetic femininity/masculinity, her and him, I and we.

> For old times' sake at the cinema, I bought myself an ice-cream, since my nanny, another true fan, had taken me to watch Tristessa when I was a child and we'd always had a choc-ice apiece so the crackle of the coat of *bitter chocolate under the teeth* and the *sharp, sweet sting of the ice against my gums* were intimately associated with my *flaming, pre-adolescent heart* and the *twitch in my budding groin* the *spectacle of Tristessa's suffering* always aroused in me (8) (*my emphasis*)
>
> Now I saw *her in her spare and emaciated flesh*, she looked far more of a ghost than she had done when, the *choc-ice melting in my hand*, I sat in childhood cinemas redolent of wet mackintoshes, Jeyes Fluid, stale urine, and watched her—for example—nursing the lepers until she caught the *dread disease herself*[...]a *fallen woman*[...]she wore a *veil thick enough to hide the ravages of the disease*[...]So *she died and he was sorry and so was I*, I *licked the melted chocolate* from the silver paper, to extract a bit of comfort from it. So *some of my own tears must have glistened in Tristessa's eyes* since I had dowered her with such a shower long ago, far away, over the rainbow, when I was a child.[...]now she *gave me my tears back again* with interest (122) (*my emphasis*)

The bulimic metaphors reflect the retrospective narrator New Eve/lyn's antagonistic relation to the social fiction of femininity framed in a scenario of suffering. The female body is identified with food to be ruthlessly devoured and compulsively disgorged in a destabilizing abjectification of the subject that coincides with the rejection of the 'other(ed)' (sex/gender) from the self.

Thus, in the long run, the neurotic bodies of anorexic or bulimic female patients can be interpreted as texts making ideology-critical statements[65] about the violent social (de)formation of femininity. These body-texts virtually and dramatically embody the dizzying see-saw of the paradoxically interpellated femininized subject—inherently associated with an aching corporeality incompatible with the pleasures of masculinized agency—, as she is doomed to sway between mutually exclusive gender-identities, bingeing and purging herself in the passion of becoming (a-)woman. However, as Bordo notes, even though these 'duly' modified bodies may suggest androgynous independence by incorporating both genders' archetypal traits, yet in a "pitiful paradox," their parody, exposing the interiorized contradictions, finally becomes a "war that tears the subject in two," destroying her health, imprisoning her imagination. Body dysmorphic patients, like *PNE*'s gender-troubled hero(in)es, merely mark "pathologies of female protest" "written in languages of horrible suffering." They function "paradoxically, as if in collusion with the cultural conditions that produce them, yet [they are] reproducing them rather than transforming precisely that which is being protested" (Bordo 1993, 174, 176, 177).

iv. The Patho-Logic (of) Postmodern Transsexual

In my view, *PNE* does not offer enabling embodied protests of multiply gendered narrative voices. Nor does it empower gender-bender identities fuelled by the revolutionary political potential of Butler's destabilizing-denaturalizing parodic performance of gender. It fails to enact a fully celebratory feminist revision that reveals, through the *différance* of repetition, the original as a copy of the copy. Instead, *PNE*'s reader is faced with abortive narrative voices, emptied symbols, disillusioning simulacra, and a painful perpetual vanishing of gendered identities in a nauseous, 'retching,' 'indigestible' narrative. Instead of Judith Butler's playfully gender-troubling, parodically political transvestite performance, (Butler 1990, 1-35) the Carterian text recalls Jean Baudrillard's sceptic interpretation of the transsexual or transvestite subject. In Baudrillard's view, symbolically speaking, all postmodern subjects are transsexual transvestite beings characterized by a disillusioned play with the non-difference of genders, a disinterest towards sexuality as a source of pleasure, and a surgical or semiotic manipulation of the body turned into a hyper-real prothesis, an artificial androgyn. Baudrillard's 'post-transsexual' subject is distinguished by a disbelief in authentic identity that

is displayed through the over-theatricalization, the elusive performance of one's self-simulating image(s), surfacing in an ambiguous, ephemeral, changing *look*. (Baudrillard 1997, 23-28) Eve/lyn and Tristessa prophetically foreshadow Baudrillard's contemporary gender-bending fugitives, these genetically baroque beings, freakish mutants with confused non-identifiable gender identities, these unreliable simulacra, reflecting, from a pessimistic, paranoid perspective, a postmodern *Zeitgeist* of radical agnosticism, uncertainty, anxiety and chaos.

Moreover, the emblematic meeting-place of the Carterian transgender beings is the American desert, which is a symbolic landscape in Baudrillard's philosophy (see Baudrillard 1996, 7-19), as it constitutes the quintessence of perfectly pretended hyper-real simulacrum. The desert as the post-transvestites' dystopian dwelling place symbolizes for Baudrillard and Carter alike ruthless disinterestedness, irreferentiality and disconnection, ending up in the desireless immobility of an immanent, 'solar' neutrality. This desert of infinite meaninglessness, at the end of the journey without end, swallows up the ascetic body that dissolves in a vertiginiously a-symptomatic, amnesiac dis-appearance. like the bulimic body hungrily hunting down lack with an all-engulfing emptiness.

Carter's writing style models the self-tormenting dissolution of the deserted, trans-sexual, bulimic body by de-composing an over-written, hyper-stylized, magically mannerist text that is unable to gain relief by outpouring in an overwhelming victorious flood. The nervous female body is narrated excessively: (1) via transforming the hysteric, compulsive motor movements into repetition and antagonism, (2) via turning body dysmorphic vomiting and diarrhea into an excessive accumulation of metaphors, metonyms, series of synonyms, avalanches of adjectives and adverbials, (3) via converting hypochondriac narrativizations of the disease into lengthy sentences on the engendering construction of femininity, and (4) via translating hypersensitivity into a text on/of desire. Yet, the semioticization of the nervous body fails to become a healing strategy enabling Freudian sublimation (that could bring alleviation via the traumas' creative textual reformulations). The text is unable to overflow disburdened, celebratorily. Instead, it suffers constipated and retches uneased. It trembles with neurotic convulsions and muscle contractions. It returns to its point of origin disillusioned. It lacks goals, depth or accomplished meanings. It suffocates in simulacra.

v. Abortive/Castrated Narratives

The magical realist, picaresque story is full of surprising adventures, unexpected turns, passionate and stunning characters. Due to the very nature of the genre, it guarantees a total textual pleasure for the readers ready to lose themselves in the fictive worlds of the exciting narrative. Yet, the self-decomposing narrative systematically strives at establishing an un-

pleasure of/in the text. It constantly aborts the comfortably linear flow of the retrospective autobiografictional narrative, it betrays secrets too early, and ruins the delightful narrative tension, 'murdering' the whole story through what I call *reader-nettlers*, lines giving away punch-lines ill-timed, prematurely (—thus, standing in sharp contrast with *WC*'s exciting, satisfying *reader-teasers* which arouse readerly curiosity and increase amusing narrative tension). In fact, the narrative starts out with one of its characteristic *reader-nettlers*. When at the very beginning of the novel Evelyn pays a visit to a London cinema, he not only recalls his past boyhood desires and adolescent crush on Tristessa, but also forecasts future passions that are going to constitute the main gist of the story to be told: "I would fly to a new place, another country, and never imagined I might find her [Tristessa] there, waiting for revivification, for the kiss of a lover who would rouse her from her reverie, she fleshly synthesis of the dream, both dreamer and dreamed" (9). Tristessa appears in person only on page 119 but already on page 9 she is disclosed as one of the protagonists of the passion. While an unnamed girlfriend performs fellatio on Evelyn in the same cinema, he muses giving away events to come: "She kept a hieroglyph of plastic in the neck of her womb, to prevent conception, the black lady never advised me on those techniques when she fitted me up with a uterus of my own" (9). Thus, we immediately learn the punch-line of the story, that the passion of New Eve will narrate the sex-changed Evelyn's adventures! In New York, Baroslav's alchemical gold (tellingly located next to the print of a hermaphrodite! (13)) is predestined to be given to the seductress Leilah (14), while the chaotic city already opens up like the black thighs of Mother will (16). Crucial characters are revealed before their due arrival to the narrative. On entering the desert, Evelyn prematurely makes known that he will find there himself, "although this self was a perfect stranger to me" (38), whereas on arriving to Beulah, he lets out that "it is a profane place. It will become the place where I was born" (47). (He ironically comments upon succeeding events, unknown then: "that was the last I'd ever see of my facial hair, though I didn't know that then" (55).) On stepping into Tristessa's glass mansion, Evelyn already sees New Eve reflected in the mirrors "as if she were wearing a bridal veil" (94). On hearing the first notes of music in the deserted castle without any trace of Tristessa, readers are already informed about the nearing tragedy: "by the time they crucified Tristessa, the music had diminished to no more than an asthmatic rubble" (116), while on the freakish marriage ceremony Eve/lyn discloses her/his final apparition on the novel's last page as an expectant mother-to-be ("My bride will become my child's father." (136)).

Peter Brooks outlines a model for reading and understanding narrative plot in the light of the Freudian masterplot "beyond the pleasure principle." He claims that "the desire of the text

(the desire of reading) is desire for the end, but[...]reached only through the at least minimally complicated *détour*, the intentional deviance, in tension, which is the plot of the narrative" (Brooks 1984, 104). Readers motivated by the death drive yearn to learn final conclusions, yet they want to postpone this ending the latest possible to make the pleasures of reading last. In my view, *PNE* consistently denies the required satisfactory distance between beginning and ending, and provokes an irritating unease by refusing and 'working against' the readerly interpretations' Brooksian dynamic model that effectively "structures ends ([Thanatos,] death instinct, quiescence, non-narratibility) against beginnings (Eros, [libidinal drives,] stimulation into tension, the desire of the narrative) in a manner that necessitates the middle as *détour*, as struggle toward the end under the compulsion of imposed delay, as arabesque in the dilatory space of the text" (Brooks 1984, 107). The arousal of beginnings, the readerly curiosity, the desire for the end are satisfied prematurely. Conforming to the symptoms of the bulimic narrative, devouring (the gluttonous consumption of the text) is followed by a quick disgorging (too early disclosure of secrets dissatisfying, even disgusting readerly hungers). The narrative's metaphorically cannibalistic self-consumption disrupts readerly 'metabolism' and denies the pleasures promised by the slow digestion of the narrative. There is no place left for the pleasurable tension of desiring, the narrative 'commits suicide' by falling victim of the Brooksian narrative "short-circuit" that signifies the dangerously premature reaching of the end, of making the wrong choice, of achieving the improper death (Brooks 1984, 109). As Carter claims in her last novel, *WC*, nothing is tragic, except untimely death (Carter 1991, 215). Accordingly, Eve/lyn's narrative, ruthlessly aborted or castrated by short-circuits, models the painful passion of her/his story-telling itself.

vi. Deserted Symbols

The bulimic narrative structure stuffs itself and regurgitates un-eased on the level of symbols as well. The novel constitutes a surrealist collage overabounding with symbols, yet these enigmatic signs are either related to pain—in the hurting landscapes tracing a topography of pain representing tormented female anatomy—,or mainly they appear as 'pseudo-symbols' emptied of meanings, impossible to interrelate into a coherent emblematic system. The novel's symbols merely reveal in their imbroglio the inescapable disintegration of self-deconstructing texts and bodies, as well as the illusory nature of simulated fictional wor(l)ds.

Baroslav, the Czech alchemist, Evelyn's only friend in New York, heralds a "fructifying chaos of anteriority" that impels "towards the creation of a new order of phenomena of hidden meanings" (14), but only "undifferentiated dissolution" is born out of his cauldron of chaos. Ironically, when he is beaten to death in the streets, Baroslav's secret alchemical books,

crucibles and alembics, these enigmatic objects with symbolic significance are cleared out of the way as his apartment is let to a disillusioned, down-to-earth, bottomless go-go dancer. As several critics underline, the stages of Baroslav's alchemy (from nigredo to rubedo and to gold) accompany Eve/lyn on his/her passion's stages (Johnson 1997, 169, Day 1998, 108), yet this journey is a *circulus viciosus* leading nowhere. Baroslav's alchemical gold initiates the dissemination of symbols void of meaning in a proliferation of simulacra, which simply entails a final disillusion felt at the stagnant endpoint of origin upon the impossibility of rebirth. With the *alchemical gold* given to Leilah at the beginning of the journey, and regained at its end in the *cave*—next to enigmatic objects as *Tristessa's photograph*, a *blood stain*, and a *swan*-necked *glass* flask with a chunk of *amber* containing a *bird-feather*—Eve/lyn buys a *coffin* from the *blind* Mother to *sail away* in it to nowhere on the transgender *fluid* of the "*ocean, mother* of *mysteries*, bear[ing] to the place of *birth*" (191).

Likewise, Zero's cacophonic symbolic rhetoric is regarded as nonsense by Eve/lyn: inspired by marijuana, "his ranch house was Solomon's temple, the ghost town was the New Jerusalem, the helicopter his chariot of fire, his prick his bow of burning gold, etc etc etc." (100). Submerged in a similar catachresis, Tristessa's figure is another good example for the novel's twisted, chaotic iconography. (S)he fuses the Unicorn, the Baudelarian albatross, Jesus, Ezekiel, Lot's wife, Lazarus, Cassandra, the Enigma, the Virgin, the Mother, the *Femme Fatale*, the Masochistic Martyr, the Mirror, Madame Bovary, Catherine Earnshaw, Madeline Usher, Scarlett O'Hara, Juliet, Desdemona, Dido, the Camelia Lady, Bloody Mary, and many more—until, in a crisis of identity, (s)he is finally no-one.

Quite tellingly, one powerful symbol is over-emphatically emptied of its meaning—via a proliferation of meanings—so that in the end it becomes a *pseudo-* and *meta*-symbol merely reflecting the inevitable disintegration of icons, the delusive and insufficient nature of (iconic) representation. The albatross is a sign of tireless journeys, infinite creativity, unattainable desires, "a heavenly acrobat with angelic Icarian wings," "Bird of Hermes, the bleeding bird of the iconography of the alchemists," "bane of Ancient Mariner," whose murder is the most ominous of all signs. Yet in Carter this albatross is "now[...]turn[ing] to dead and putrefying matter," rotting, covered with carrion ants, so that it makes Eve/lyn *vomit* (44). (*my emphasis*)

vii. A Disembodied Body-Text

With a cruel irony and a paradoxical ambiguity of the devouring-disgorging bulimic text, the baroquish overflowing narrative is tainted with a minimalist-like neutralized voice. Maniac over-verbalization is aborted disrupted by an ascetic taciturnity at the traumatic points of the plot, as Eve/lyn primarily narrates her/his passion, the detailed account of her/his

apprenticeship into suffering femininity in a distanced, unmoved, even disinterested, laconic voice. When Mother ritually castrates Eve/lyn (s)he stoically comments: "Raising her knife, she brought it down. She cut off my genital appendages with a single blow[...]she excised everything I had been" (71). When Zero rapes her/him (s)he wonders disinterested: "I felt a sense of grateful detachment from this degradation, I registered in my mind only the poignant fact of my second rape in two hours: "Poor Eve! She's being screwed again!" (91). And when Tristessa dies (s)he simply claims: "An officer shot Tristessa immediately with his revolver. A devastating sorrow overcame me. Then they dug a hole in the sand, threw in his body" (156). Along with other women in the story, Eve/lyn is violently battered and tormented, she undergoes a drastic operation, a mutilation, a rape, yet (s)he never spills any blood nor sheds tears. (She even doubts the veracity of these 'feminine bodyfluids.' New Eve's women's bleeding or Tristessa's trademark tears seem fake to her.) (S)he never 'lives' or believes her/his pain. Hers is the anestheticized pain, the self-negating passion of the bulimic. Like in the case of the body dysmorphic patient, Eve/lyn's corporeal fissure—the abject wound of her newly-formed vagina—her/his confrontation with material bodily reality strangely opens up the way to disembodiment, to an alienation of the body. From this perspective, *PNE*'s anaestheticized passion (de)forms a disembodied body-text.

viii. A Novel of Perpetual Vanishing

Although, as I have argued, *PNE* is fuelled by the presence of painfully freaked, pathological corporealities, the narrative is also marked by a 'perpetual vanishing' of bodies. The novel's gender-destabilization does not lead to a joyous celebration of heterogeneous corporealities allowing for subversively re-embodied dynamic 'subjectivities-on-trial,' but instead—as in a text of pain—it guarantees merely the disillusioned dis-appearance of no-bodies. In a scenario of perpetual vanishing, Tristessa is deprived of her essential markers of femininity and is buried in the desert. Zero loses his prosthetic leg (this castrated phallic symbol) as he is blown away with his wives in the whirlwind of the glass castle. Mother is denigrated to a "figure of speech" and diminished, wanders off to die on the seashore. Lilith loses the carnal Leilah in her and disappears in the chaos of the civil war. Eve/lyn herself/himself casts away the phallic apparatus of his male member and denies the consolatory myths of motherhood interpellating her pregnant body, so as to leave them all behind, to sail away on the sea towards no-where, where (s)he is not hoping to find *an* identity matching the body that is not her/his anymore. The journey back to the "place of birth" is a voyage to the beginning and to the end. Thus, the picaresque turned circular loses its target, the quest for a self turns meaningless, the traditional teleology of the *Bildungsroman* is neglected, via the

emptied symbols magical realism's magic vanishes. Instead of the quiescence of a closure, an unresolved irritation remains in the plot (see Brooks 1984), as the Carterian overwriting style paradoxically seems to coincide with what Tom Paulin calls—though in a negative critique—a "permanent and infinite vanishing" of a borderless, expansive text (Bristow-Broughton 1997, 6)[66] torn apart by mutually abortive and castrating voices, which all narrate the disillusion of subjects and the disintegration of bodies.

6. In Place of Conclusion to *PNE*. Shattering the Looking Glass

I disagree with one of the latest monographers of Carter, Aidan Day, who calls the Carterian text a "rational glass." In Day's interpretation, the self-conscious political project of Carter's writing consists of going into mythic territory to make an anti-mythic point, with the aim to demythologize essentialism, along with chaotic irrationalism, and postmodern relativity, in order to celebrate the traditional values of history, rationality and humanism. (see Day 1998) In my view, Carter's fictional world is no more rational than the Lacanian looking glass that *reveals* the mis-self-recognition of the subject as a seemingly coherent, self-sufficient entity, yet does not provide any 'rational reflections' of, or any alternatives for an 'authentic image of the self'. (Lacan 1992) If Carter's art is mimetic, its political project aims at miming the irrationality of the world, its unsolvable tensions, paradoxical antagonisms (to be celebrated or feared), a chaos that is so convincingly called to life in *PNE*'s fictional space. The Carterian glass is fatally broken, so that the million shattered pieces mirror multiple perspectives, resisting a homogeneous single view, enabling a look from elsewhere, yet remaining conscious of the illusoriness of perception and representation, of all images being sheer simulacra.[67] As the self-conscious woman-writer, Carter—always propagating the demythologization of fossilized myths, of patriarchal traditional values (precisely as Day's history, rationality and humanism)—stresses:

> "everything is relative, you see the world differently from different places. You cannot make any statements which are universally true, everything is determined by different circumstances, and the circumstances of women are different from those of men. It's a point which men don't make when the write...because they really do believe that the world is made in their image" (Haffenden 1985, 94)

This argument is stated in fictional terms[68] in *PNE*, where the breaking of the Carterian looking glass is demonstrated via violent narrative decompositions, corporeal disintegrations, and identity-deconstructions, providing drastically distorted reflections of a unrealistic reality.

I do not think that the Carterian mirror is ever 'mended' to become the solid, trustworthy, rational glass Day praises. Carter's succeeding novels continue distorting ready-

made images, writing against patriarchal produced truths, established values, and ready-made myths. But the suffering does cease. Instead of painful self-cruci*fiction* the Carterian writing turns towards/into a joyous celebration in/of the text. In Carter's trilogy on spectacularly self-freaking bodies performing subversive femininities, *PNE*'s sequels, *NC* and *WC* 'recycle' the most memorable characters, events, scenes and images of the trilogy's first part. Yet Eve/lyn's bitter disillusion is transformed into Fevvers's cheerfulness to ripen into Nora and Dora's wise laughter. The masquerade of femininity, instead of signifying a painful submission to the traditionally prescribed masculine economy of desire, enables a playful, pleasurable, innovative performance, enabling women's writings of their own (selves). The freakish female body does not signal any more pathological deformation, but a gift allowing liberation. The Amazons's self-enclosed, infertile, frigid female community reappears as Ma Nelson's all-embracing, sisterly commune of suffragette whores, and later as the Chances' multi-matriarchal, solidarity-based, invented family. The castrating, cannibalistic Mother of New Eve is succeeded by the benevolent, vegetarian Grandma Chance of wise children. The fossilized myth of Mother and biological motherhood is replaced by mothering, and 'mother-substitutes' as Lizzie or Grandma Chance, who model a Gilliganian feminist ethics of care Even Zero's evil pigs return transformed as Colonel Kearney's "porcine assistant," the ludic and lovable Sybil. Yet the most convincing argument supporting this tempting, optimistic interpretation of the trilogy is put forward by Elaine Jordan, who suggests that "the child Eve is pregnant with[...]turns up on Lizzie's doorsteps[...]and becomes—not quite the New Woman, but the great big tricky performance artiste Fevvers," who brings along with her "the common pleasure of pantomime" (Jordan 1998, 213) that will peak in the seductress dance-hall-girl Chance twins—metaphorically Fevvers's daughters—comic yet caring show.

IV. Corporeal and Textual Performance as Comic Confidence Trick. in Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*

"Either one laughs at [the bourgeois] Order from within,
or one must curse it from without,
either one feigns to accept it so as to able to expose it,
or one feigns to reject it only to bring it about again in other forms,
either one is Rabelais, or one is Descartes."
(Umberto Eco 1976, 96)[69]
"I'm no angel, but I've spread my wings a bit." (Mae West, 1933)[70]

The picaresque *NC*[71] narrates the magical adventures of the winged giantess Fevvers, a born (or rather hatched) performer, trickster, trapeze artist, starring the 1899 Grand Imperial Tour of Colonel Kearney's circus. Fevvers, the Gargantuan aerialiste with wings incorporates

"the *éclat* of the new era about to take off" (11) and the 'New Woman' who rejects the Victorian cult of domesticized, patriarchally dominated femininity, and vindicates greater freedom for herself. The birdwoman emblematizes change and womanly revolt through embodying the *carnivalesque grotesque* celebrated by Bakhtin for its unnatural(ized) corporeality's transgressive potential of subverting ordered systems via overturning hierarchies, violating boundaries, and resisting closure. In the followings, I demonstrate how the winged giantess Fevvers' freakish body resists Bakhtin's disciplined, closed, homogenized *classical body* through spectacularly enacting a Bakhtinian *carnivalesque grotesque body* characterised by an uncontrollably, excessively ambiguous, irregular, metamorphic corporeality that playfully enables communally liberating pleasures of alternative, empowering subject- and authorial- positions for the marginalized (women). I also reveal how the characteristic differences of the carnivalesque grotesque body are 'recycled' by the Carterian self-freaking body, how they become textualized in a subversive narrative recalling the *carnivalesque language* described by Bakhtin as a playful, familiar speech of the fairs fuelled by a folk laughter associated with polyphonic ambivalence, jovial vulgarity, transgressive excess, and a delirious unmaking of the social order's hierarchical dichotomies (Bakhtin 2000, 158-213). *NC* exploits carnivalesque language's potential to undermine the patriarchally produced, privileged and monopolized, ideologically- canonically- 'masculinized' 'official discourse', 'readable representation' and authorial authorities alike.

1. Grotesque Bodies and Carnivalesque Discourses[72]

Fevvers' stage names, mocking the '*Nomen est Omen* tradition' and the compulsory 'Name of the Father' (predestining *his* child to repeat his story), and reflect the paradoxical and playful carnivalesque grotesque being. Fevvers, a foundling, is initially christened Sophia by her stepmother, Lizzie, and sincere to this name meaning 'wisdom' she renames herself cleverly, choosing ambivalent psedonyms (un)masking her throughout the ironic 'confidence trickster' performances of her deconstructing selves. "Fevvers" merges the physically symptomatic "fever" with the sublime symbolically spiritual "feather," while "Cockney Venus," "Helen of the High Wire" (7), and "Madonna of the Arena" (126) degrade conventional values by fusing sacred idols with their lowly, profane opposites.

The primarily *ambiguous* Fevvers, as "Queen of ambiguities, goddess of in-between states" (81), chooses the slogan "Is she fact or is she fiction?" to underline the polysemic, undecidable nature of her spectacularly changing identity. She acts out the "feathered frump" "cripple" (19), "marvellous monster," and estranged "alien creature" (161), this earth-bound giantess with useless wings, her mutant bodily protuberances recalling the deformations of a

hunchback, while antagonistically, she also performs the role of the sublime aerialiste, the angelic winged wonder, a "fabulous bird-woman" (15) defying the laws of the gravity in her gracefully erotic art on the trapeze. Fevvers mocks the spectators' (the readers') epistemophilic gaze, as she never provides a final answer to her being a fact or a fiction. The increasingly charmed journalist Walser interviewing her can merely wander upon the paradox: "an authentic miracle must purport to be a hoax, in order to gain credit in the world (?)" (17), while Fevvers laughs at him (at us), adding ironically "Oh, Lizzie, the gentleman must know the truth!" (35). Moreover, Fevvers' "assymetric splendour" (8) is enhanced through her embracing the grotesque degradation of sublime beauty. She is "divinely tall" yet looks "more like a dray mare than an angel," her wonderful face seems "broad and oval as a meat dish" (12), "beefsteak red and gleaming" (13), or wholesome like an "Iowa cornfield" (18), while her star's dressing-room is "mean as a kitchenmaid's attic" (14). The fantastically winged wonder recalls an "over-literal winged barmaid" (16) who fuses "Cockney sparrow" (41) and "tropical bird" in the sophisticated flight of a "Trafalgar square pigeon flapping and plummeting "lazily enough to show off the crack in her bum" (17). The sublimely vulgar, monstrously wondrous, bird-woman, Fevvers fully embodies the 'subject in process/ on trial' (Kristeva 1985, 37) balancing on a borderline in a self-freaking body always becoming an 'other,' while playing on the subversive potential of the pregnant body's stereotypical 'female grotesquerie,' metaphorically giving birth to herself again and again anew. Fevvers' first spreading of her wings, ripping her chemise is extremely erotic, yet her rebirth as a winged woman is combined in a grotesque way with death, since it is also the annunciation of her stepmother's menopause (24), the closure of her procreativity, that signals in a patriarchal logic the end of her femininity. Yet, this closure of womanliness is rendered meaningless by Fevvers' hyper-antagonistic, spectacular and self-ironic re/de-constructions of femininity.

Fevvers' body besides being ambiguous bears the grotesque feature of *excess* that furthers her carnivalesque transgressions. An angel *and* a giantess with both wings *and* arms, she is "the impossible made doubly unlikely—the impossible squared" (15). Her height of six feet two, her enormous breasts, her two yards of golden hair, her six inches long false eyelashes and the superfluous protuberances of her wing-supplements embody her "grand, vulgar, careless generosity" (12) coupled with an "enormous appetite", "gigantic coquetry" (21) and a "gargantuan enthusiasm" (22). The robustly Rubenesque Fevvers performs a nonproductive expenditure never thinking of calculation (paradoxically she is also a sweating worker who earns money with her physical strength—thus, she is a material girl, in all senses of the term). She is "big girl" (7) a "marvellous giantess" (42) whose feverish excess and

monstrous attractivity is just as threatening in the eyes of Walser as it is seducing. When she yawns "with prodigious energy, opening up a crimson maw the size of a basking shark, taking in enough air to lift a Montgolfier," and stretches hugely as if "she intended to fill up all the mirror, all the room with her bulk," Walser is convulsed with nauseous panic and a "seismic erotic disturbance" (53). The corporeal fissure of Fevvers' mouth evokes patriarchally mythified *topoi* of the Hell's Mouth, the fatally attractive *vagina dentata*, the grottoesque cave, or the devouring lioness, yet simultaneously—as time stops in Fevvers' dressing room—her yawn recalls just "a girl who has stayed up too long" (87).

Fevvers' enacts an excessively *sexualized* body, exhibiting its *vulgar corporeal* functions, the "abjectification of the subject" (Kiss 1996, 21), the violent yet celebratory destabilization of the homogenized self via the re-embodiment of its repressed materiality: she sweats, farts, gorges, gulps, belches, yawns, irrespectable of body-disciplining social conventions of politeness. The "essence of Fevvers", the "highly personal aroma" of her dressing room is contains a "powerful note of stale feet" (9), "sharp gusts of cheap scent" of Parma violets (25), mingled with the smell of sweaty underwear, of eel pie with mash and gallons of champagne. She is an earthly giantess, a female Gargantua: with a Rabelaisian appetite she stuffs herself, spilling gravy, sucking up peas from the knife "with table manners of the Elizabethan variety" (22), she pours the sugar into her mug in a stream, directly from the bag (43), pops the cork of "a chilled magnum of champagne between her teeth" (8). Crying she blows her nose "rather disgustingly between her fingers" (142), while her loud laughter is a "spiralling tornado" twisting and shuddering across the entire globe (295). An angel with smut on her nose (75), she repulses and ravishes Walser, when she talks openly about lowly physicality, her woman's bleeding, calling it the marvellous blossoming of her flesh (23). Refusing to discipline her body, she mocks the journalist (reader) willing to frame her within his pragmatic, rational report (reading), and provokes the patriarchally prescribed 'feminine' codes of conduct, as well as the autobiographical genre's conventions of self-correction, reflecting our confessional society's (Foucault 1996) discursive technologies aiming at the subject's normalization.

Particularly tellingly, Fevvers' strange *voice*—this musical, homely (43), whispering (24), mysteriously coquettish and caressing voice (156) that sounds "raucous and metallic[...]clanging of contralto or even baritone dustbins" (13), as a fishwife's voice (189) imperious as a siren's (43) "rasping like the tongue of a tiger" (143)—directly points towars the somatization of the text, since it proves to be a sonic enactment of the *carnivalesque grotesque*'s inherent ambiguity, excess and subversive corporeal reality that provides a

metatextual echo (or a *mise-en-scène*) of her constantly transforming, polyphonic, catachretic narrative and her corporeally metamorphosing, shape-shifting performances. Matching her antagonistic voice, Fevvers' speech combines the highbrow, sometimes affected utterances of a cultivated perfect lady and the coarse, vulgar slang of a street girl or a rag and bone merchant (88), mockingly mixing different registers with sentences like "This is some kind of heretical possibly Manichean version of Neo-Platonic Rosicrucianism, thinks I to myself, tread carefully, girlie! I exort myself" (77).[73] Moreover, the *ambiguity* of Fevvers' troubling-voiced, freakish body is textualized in the various poetic figures and tropes of *mésalliance*—metaphors condensating, metonyms displacing different concepts, litotes expressing meaning ironically with opposite meanings, and oxymorons yoking together antagonistic terms—which fuse to produce a complex catachresis in the story of the "robustly rosy cheeked" (18), "less colossal than human," "overliteral winged barmaid" (16), with "assymetric splendour" (8), "the portly dignity of a Trafalgar square pigeon" (17), as the "Cockney Venus" (132) is an oxymoron itself, disturbing and entertaining destabilized readers.

The *excessive* behaviour and the *protuberant deformations* of Fevvers' freakish body surface in the gradually somatized text through recurring exaggerating hyperboles, endless enumerations and descriptions accumulating adjectives, semantically redundant pleonasms, unnecessary lengthy periphrases, avalanches of extended metaphors and poetic images, and a joyous luxuriation in every possible rhetorical excess characterising the Carterian 'over-writing.' As self-acclaimed magical mannerist Carter claims: "I would say that I half-suffocate them [readers] with the enthusiasm with which I wrap my arms and legs around them" (Haffenden 1985, 91). Fevvers' excessive carnivalesque identity is semioticized via exaggerating, self-contradictory and highly expressive corporeal images, depicting the tornado of her enormously delightful and convulsing laughter (295), her celestially cavernous, imperious voice (47), her cheap polychromatic flamingo-pink, monstrously eagle-like wings (15) or her half hundredweight of mermaid's, maenad's or dyed blonde clown's hair (78).[74] In a characteristic passage: "Her breast fluttered as if her heart wanted to fly out. Her heavy head hung down like a bell that has ceased tolling. She even seemed to have diminished in size, to have shrunk to proportions only a little more colossal than human. She closed her eyes and let out a long exhilaration of breath." (87) These poetic lines are typically Carterain in so far as they not only use within excessive descriptions paradoxical similees (the upward of "as if flying" and the downward of "hung down like a bell"), but also fuse tropes playing with sounds ("flutter"-"fly," "bell"-"toll"), alliterations ("her heavy head hung"), onomatopoeia

("fluttered," "tolling"), and the embodied voice ("exhilaration of breath") with the aim to invoke the material reality of Fevvers' corporeal presence into the text.

The *corporeal presence* of Fevvers' freakish self is represented *antagonistically* in the somatized narrative via the carnivalesque language's obscene licentiousness ("me old cock" (89)) fused with sophisticated eroticism ("soft, feathery growths...pulling my shoulders backwards with the weight and urgency of an invisible lover" (27)), and swearing ("rot her soul" (73)) or degrading travesties (Cockney Venus (132), Madonna of the Arena (126), unhorsed Walkyrie (150)) mixed with winking self-corrections ("pardon my French" (70)), as well as the realistic description of the lowliest bodily functions comically tinted with poetic tones (see alliteration in: "she let a *r*ipping fa*r*t *r*ing *r*ound the *r*oom" (11)). Thus, the narrative reaches an intensive effect carnivalesquely celebrating the totality of life by addressing all the senses, making the reader feel, smell, hear, taste, touch Fevvers' very body, and Carter's very text. On the level of the text's somatization, a *(re)embodied voice* can be deciphered in the oral exclamations, in the lively vocality of the text-- the "Splat!" (13), the "whoosh!" (19), the "crack" (106), the "squeak, squeak" (110), the "Yes, sir!" "Ooops!" (47), the "ahem" (25) the "rat-a-tat-tat [...] and lo and behold" (46) the "H'm, [...] and, h'm, again" (79)—as well as in the onomatopoeic verbs, the roars, neighs, grunts, cries, sighs, giggle and applause echoed in the circus, and in the trans-discursive noises of Fevvers' unlimited body, her whisper, laughter, fart, belch, the bang of her empty glass, the rattle of her jars of fards, the thump of her galumphing giant feet, the swash of her wings. Fevvers' excessive, antagonistic, transgressively corporeal freak-body 'resonates' the text by the irrepressibly recurring, nonverbal sounds, the primary 'musical moves' of her material bodily reality.[75] The body-text overabounds with onomatopoeic verbs of action inviting corporeal reality and its fleeting presence into the text, destabilizing narrative temporality and moving discourse to the rhythmic tune of the body changing with passing time.[76]

Although Carter respects the modernist narrative tradition in so far as she 'tells a story' in a heterogeneous but coherent narrative, yet the 'somatic quality,' the *re-embodied voice* of the text infiltrated by the troubling, transverbal, deliriously transgressive corporeality recalls Kristeva's *revolutionary poetic language,* this carnivalesque discursive subversion enacted from within the margins of the Symbolic language to be destabilized. The freakish Fevvers succeeds to illustrate Kristeva's argument on the 'revolutionary poetic linguistic subversion' through her body-text occasional capacity to recuperate the lost pre-symbolic, transverbal Semiotic bodily bliss by semioticized corporeal energies, rhythmic, repetitive, playful linguistic subversions, musical materialities, motivated by the 'other(ed)' text(ure)s of the

body, pointing beyond conventional meanings and established language use. (Kristeva 1984) It is especially reading *NC*'s carnivalesque corporeally vibrated complex sentences out loud that guarantees the full enjoyment of the oral, vocal, tonal quality of the text, while—as I will demonstrate in the followings—it also turns the reader into a laughing being, providing a sonic celebration of self-freaking corporeal-textual destabilizations.

The representational norms and horizons of expectations are teasingly troubled by various poetic figures and vocal puns, but also by fusing denotative and figural meanings, mixing realistic and metaphoric levels. Emptied emblems materialize into physical presence, as Fevvers literally embodies a winged spirit—in Carter's words, "She's very literally a winged spirit. She's very literally the winged victory, but very, very literally so." (Katsavos 1994, 13), and caresses her bunch of lucky Parma violets (54) as if it really embodied her missed adopted-niece, little Violetta. In Carter's literalised metaphors, self-confidence lends real wings to Fevvers, who actually stumbles down off the trapeze when she falls head over heels in love with Walser. The mock aerial being puts on airs and graces, when her affected manners give the impression of great elegance but in reality have the opposite effect. Finally, at the happy (open)end of the trial, the *picaro* birdwoman can literally have the last laugh.[77]

To underline her verbal subversions, Fevvers sings raucous, unmelodious songs (matching her mirror-images,' the clowns' dance expressing chaos in a preverbal body language). As a foundling brought up by Sicilian(?) Lizzie in a multilingual London brothel, Fevvers speaks "in a clatter of languages, Italian, French, German, all barbarously pronounced and grammatically askew but rapid as machinegun fire" (128). Thus, the discursive construction of the subject takes place via polyphonic languages, so that, paradoxically, instead of reinforcing the ideologically prescribed, homogenized, discursively disciplined subject-position, Fevvers' (self-reflexive) language contributes to the detsabilization of the subject via the embracement of a heterogeneous freakish corporeality that even results in the 'abjectification of the speaking subject,' as Fevvers with "a knack for foreign languages, pick'em up like [abject] fleas" (229): language infects, tarnishes the subject instead of cleansing, homogenizing, controlling her. The reader never learns what Fevvers' mother tongue is, so—in a Derridean logic—she is the deconstructor *par excellence*, a polyglot, who thinks in foreign languages of multiplied (m)other tongue*s*, and who constantly dislocates her speakerly selves to question homogenized subjectivities, naturalized truths, and pseudo-transparent discourses alike. *NC*'s protagonist, Fevvers can be regarded as the choir leader, who befriends the circus' international crew to lead them—with a conductress' baton in the shape of Winged Victory's caricature sword—in a polyphonic text,

composed of (often doubled) mostly female freaks' subversive, transverbal voices matching their othered, weird bodies to a proliferation of somatized textures with new, joyful meanings. (The abused German child-woman Mignon "coos" (132), "purrs" (144) and makes "small guttural sounds[...]at the back of her throat" (127) and sings an English song in words without any meaning to her, in a sweet, artless soprano, "a voice matching her immature body" (132). Her pair, the clawmarked, taciturn tiger-tamer, the Princess of Abyssinia communicates only via her piano-play, until she starts with Mignon making up their own songs of love. Olga and Vera, revolting Russian female prisoners convicted for murdering their abusive husbands, make connections via touching, and via crude yet loving drawings made in their menstrual and veinous blood, excrement, all "juices of the bodies that had been so long denied" for them, a newly born "army of lovers" (217). The midget stepmother, Lizzie—weirdly looking rather like the tiny daughter of a "blonde, heroic mother [Fevvers]" (89)—curses in "dark brown voice" (13) fusing a torrent of several dialects of Italian, and writes clandestine (feminist or socialist) reports in "invisible writing" (171), as via her household magic the blank page appears as the language of the repressed other apt to mediate her socialist, feminist, anarchist messages.)[78]

2. Parodic Bodily Performances, Spectacular Gender Trouble[79]

NC—a novel called by Tamás Bényei a narrative of *spectacle*, seduction, magic and play (Bényei 1997)—is principally characterised by a spectacular performativity emerging, in seductive, magical, tricky, playful forms, on levels of textuality, of textualized corporeality, femininity, and identity alike. A simultaneous analysis of performative bodies, texts, and identities reveals how Fevvers' mockingly self-ironic re/de-constructions of ideologically prescribed, normatively idealized femininity and its limiting representations coincide with Carter's feminist revisions of literary genres and styles conventionally identified by discursive technologies of power with femininity, and thus canonized by patriarchal institutions as less valuable, sentimentally kitsch or incomprehensibly hysterical modes of writing by stereotypified authoresses as the 'silly lady novelist' (Eliot 1985, 518) or 'mad womanwriter' enjoyable only for a 'lay' female audience. My gender sensitive, reader-response theoretical approach explores—besides Fevvers' spectacularly subversive body—the *bifocal pleasures*, the *tender irony* and the *sisterly burlesque* of the self-freaking, 'self-feminizing,' (self-)ironic silly and histrionic hysteric 'feminine' textual performance (supplemented by a self-reflexive feminist metatext). I reveal how the radically opposed clichés of 'phallogocentric language' domineering weaker 'écriture féminine' are demythologized by Carter, as the rational male

journalist becomes an amorous clown-poet readily joining the female-authored carnivalesque grotesque narrative, laughing together with the winged aerialiste authoress. I examine how Fevvers' corporeal and textual "confidence trick" unveils that besides ideologically prescribed silence (see Séllei 1999), superficiality, stereotypes, or incomprehensibility, there are other wor(l)ds available for daring women writers and readers alike.

Fevvers' spectacular performances in Ma Nelson's brothel and Madame Schreck's Museum of Woman Monsters, her posing in *tableau vivant* as Cupid, "the sign of love," as Winged Victory, "a perfect, active beauty, [...] mutilated by history" (37), and as the castrating *'femme fatalish'* Angel of Death carry ambivalent meanings. She re-presents patriarchal archetypes of femininity with a wink, via a "perverse dynamics of transgressive reinscription" (Dollimore 1991, 33), or a parody turned into politics, she performs *à la* Judith Butler a "gender trouble" with the aim to denaturalize the regulative fiction of a true gender identity, and to reveal the culturally constituted, ideologically-discursively reproduced, repetitive and overall performative aspect of gender, that is always already a "copy of the copy" (Butler 1990, 31), and, thus, to provide in the long run an ironic critique of the ideology of representation limiting female identification. According to Butler and Fevvers, it is only within the (patriarchal) practices of repetitive signifying that alternative domains of cultural intelligibility, new possibilities of gender contesting the rigid codes of hierarchical binarisms, and subversions of substantive identity may become possible. (Butler 1990, 145) Butler's description of "doing gender trouble" is particularly fitting for Fevvers' excessive, ambiguous and hyper-corporeal, *carnivalesque grotesque* performance: "doing gender [she] repeat[s] and displace[s] though *hyperbole*, *dissonance*, *internal confusion*, and *proliferation* the very constructs by which [her possibilities of doing gender] are mobilized" (Butler 1990, 31) (*my emphasis*). Fevvers' wings recall patriarchal myths as the Victorian 'Angel in the House,' defined uniquely in relation to man as subordinated wife and mother, the Muse exploited to inspire male creativity and muted herself, Fairies miniaturized to be easily objected to the rape of the male gaze, as well as the winged statue of the Nike of Samothrace that simply lacks a head. However, realizing her performative possibilities for proliferating alternative gender configurations, she subverts these *clichés* of femininity 'from within.' She acts out an angel in the house of suffragette whores, her sexual activity mocks the Victorian angel, yet she also challenges the stereotype of the succubus-like whore, as her confidence trick is based on her claimed virginity. She continuously uses her heterogeneous body as a metamorphic space for the narrative deconstructions of her identity. By mock-autobiographical and self-stylizing *technologies of the self* working against body-disciplining, discursively containing

technologies of power (see Foucault 1988, 1996), she erases and rewrites traditional stories of femininity, weaving her own texts, becoming a 'confidence trickster' authoress of her own. Fevvers is a self-ironic *and* self-made woman (de)constructing her patchwork wings by recycling Leda and her divine Swan, as well as the lowly London pigeon, or the polychromatic kitsch flamingo. Her flight relies on myths and gossip, art and craft, on the established knowledge of library books, on Baudelaire's metaphor on the albatross-artist, just as much as on Lizzie's innovative, pragmatic calculations. She is never what she seems to be. In an 'internally subversive' feminist tactic she ironically re-enacts icons of femininity both to simulate and to revise them. She not only recalls Butler's politically invested parodic drag performance repeating gender with a troubling 'difference,' but also provides a more optimistic elaboration, a feminist re-reading of Rivière's masquerade[80] via her fantastic re-embodiments' self-freakings, which render engendered, homogenized identity-categories "radically incredible" (Butler 1990, 141), and reveal 'authentic womanliness' as a social fiction, while willing to incite the subversive laughter of *gender trouble* (Butler 1990, 146).

Like Carter in her "Notes from the Front Line," Fevvers indeed "question[s] the nature of [her] reality as a woman, [h]ow that social fiction of [her] 'femininity' was created, by means outside [her] control, and palmed off on [her] as the real thing" (Carter 1983, 70). Denaturalizing her femininity as a socially constructed, re-presented, non-essential identity, Fevvers' dress always appears theatricalized as cross-dressing, her hair is dyed too blonde, her eyelids bat too often, her coqettishness is overwhelming, as she displays all the compulsory markers of femininity excessively almost in a hamming, buffoonous manner—and always complemented by a note of self-irony.[81] She performs her 'femininity' with a difference, placing it under a deconstructive line of erasure or in quotation marks (~~"femininity"~~) as an inevitable yet insupportable concept and status suitable for internal self-destabilization via the enchainment of its inherent potentials of carnivalesque excess, troubling ambiguity, and corporeal metamorphosis. The self-ironic, playful re-enactment of 'becoming woman' shatters the femininized body's frames constituted by the body-disciplining *ideological technologies of gender* working through representations, which perpetuate patriarchal, 'iron-maiden-like' (beauty) myths (Wolf 1999) about women through a painfully paradoxical iconography of '(un)natural(ized)' femininity to be carved onto the female flesh[82]. Fevvers' confidence trickster identity-performances do not reconstitute but rather deconstruct the *normatively idealized* femininity, as she demythologizes patriarchal clichés of the 'abject female' or the 'ethereal feminine,' through re-enacting the smelly, whorish giantess and the blonde, aerial, intacta in one, and in 'becoming woma^{e}n' puts emphasis on becoming, heterogeneity and

revision. Similarly, Paulina Palmer celebrates Fevvers' feminist performance of identities passing from coded mannequin to bird woman, in a text turning from the investigation of femininity as entrapping, regulatory fiction towards a subversive play with femininity, its mimesis and role reversals. (Palmer 1987, 197-201) Linda Hutcheon and Mary Russo also praise the text's feminist potentials, arguing that Fevvers' parodic feminization discloses the politics of representation. Russo, on her turn, adds that the winged heroine by "revamping spectacle" not only unveils how the cultural production conceals work, sweat and materiality via stylized spectacle, but her performances of the deformed, freak, 'female grotesque' body as cultural construct succeed in reclaiming it to rechart aeriality as a corporeal space of revisionary repetitions and new possibilities. (Hutcheon 1983, Russo 1995, 177, 179)

Illustrating her parodic bodily performativity, Fevvers defies the engendered distribution of positions of spectatorship and visibility by taking advantage precisely of her feminine 'being-looked-at-ness' conventionally objectified to the 'male gaze' (see Mulvey 1991, Doane 1997, Van Zoonen 1994). Her slogan, "LOOK AT ME!" that repeats the feminized, objectified 'spectacle-position,' is complemented and destabilized by her motto, "Look! (but) Hands off!" (15) that refuses female objectification through providing an ironic metatext on her self-spectacularizing femininity in the voice of the ambiguous exhibitionist-voyeur who recognizes her unescapable engendering, yet reclaims her female spectatorial pleasures as well. The giantess aerialiste's eyes, the most grotesque body parts in the Bakhtinian corporeal topography, gain an erotic investment and a feminist re-visionary potential in Carter.

> She turned her immense eyes upon him, those eyes made for the stage[...]Walser felt the strangest sensation as if these eyes of the aerialiste were a pair of sets of Chinese boxes, as if each one opened into a world into a world into a world, an infinite plurality of worlds, and these unguessable depths exercised the strongest possible attraction, so that he felt himself trembling as if he, too, stood on an unknown threshold (29, see 40, 48, 78, 87).

As Mary Russo suggests, Fevvers troubles the spectator-spectacle hierarchical engendered divide through her profession, as the female trapeze artist's weird body destabilizes gender by an ambiguous relation to the gaze: her being objected to the scopophilia of the male spectator reinforces masculine power position, but the masculine voyeur is obliged to look upward, and he is hence diminished, becoming "dwarfed, clownish or infantilized" (Russo 1995, 171) exactly due to his 'male gaze' destined to master the woman as spectacle. Fevvers subverts her spectacularity to her own ends, ambiguous, ever-changing she can never be pinned down as a trophy of the male Collector, she resists the final

meanings desired by journalist Walser aiming to decode her as a great humbug of the world. Fevvers looks back laughing, and contemplates her being a spectacle with a wink.

3. The Tender Irony and Sisterly Burlesque of Textual Performance

Fevvers' trademark *confidence trickster* identity-performances clearly constitute spectacular re-embodiments of stereotypical feminine roles turned into parodies via their self-reflexive critical re-enactments. Yet, perhaps it is less self-evident that the traditionally 'feminine' styles and genres 'recycled' in the narrative are also of a tenderly ironic, spectacularly performative, critically meta-textual nature. My aim is to reveal how the Butlerian politically invested, parodic performance of '(mis)gendered' identities 'repeated with a difference' is complemented by a narrative performance surfacing in the feminist discursive subversion of Irigaray's *mimicry. Mimicry* converts female subordination into affirmation, through "recovering the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it," in so far as woman resubmits herself on the side of the 'matter' to ideas about herself elaborated in/by a masculine logic "so as to make visible, by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible: the cover-up of a possible operation of the feminine in language" (Irigaray 1993, 124).

Several critics interpret *NC* as a postmodern yet sentimental love story. Pitying its re-presentations of limiting feminine stereotypes, or praising its re-visionary feminist potentials, they argue that the novel remains within the frames of the feminine romance tradition. Carolyn See describes the novel as an old-fashioned romance (Boehm 1998, 198), in Sarah Gamble's view, the novel with an idyllic happy ending is "absolutely serious in maintaining the desirability and the perils of romantic love," and in stressing the need for "authentic emotion to be had in the world outside the circus," whereas according to Andrzej Gasiorek, the novel "envisages the closing of the last century as the opening of a brave new feminist world" (Gamble 166, 162), and Magali Cornier Michael claims that its rewritten femininity seriously combines didactic material realist feminism with utopian feminism (Cornier Michael 1998). Although the former two interpretations seem rather simplifying, and the latter suggest over-politicized programme readings, unlike Beth A. Boehm, I would not call them misreadings or "failures to employ the interpretive strategies the author has imagined to be available to the reader" (Boehm 1998, 193). After the Barthesian *death of the author* (Barthes 1977) (questioning the authority of the author as a source, guarantee and possessor of meaning), in a pantextual deconstructive era of self-disseminating meanings and inevitable misunderstandings, in my view the concept of 'misreading' as a standard of value has lost its

validity. On analyzing any process of signifiance that, instead of closing, opens up the free play of multiple meanings of a text—it is better to avoid the patriarchal canon's characteristic hierarchization between good and bad, laic and elite, feminine and feminist readings. Recalling my first reading of *NC,* in the late 1990s, at my early twenties, I remember having found pleasure in reading the novel—that I found similar to my former favourite, Carter's short-story, "The Company of Wolves"—as the celebration of a blissful reunion of violent binary gender oppositions, a common initiation into the paradisiac realm of shared sexual pleasures, in the spirit of Eastern philosophy of the Foucauldian *ars erotica* (Foucault 1996). I do not think that the enthusiasm of my past, romantic reception of the novel is a less valuable readerly experience, not to mention an interpretative failure, as opposed to my present, perhaps less naïve, and critically more self-conscious, feminist re-reading. Elaborating on Susan Rubin Suleiman's concept of bifocal vision, I would like to call these two different readerly gazes, looking alike for textual pleasure with a shared scopophiliac-epistemophilic curiosity, *bifocal and myopic readerly points of view.*[83] Suleiman, reflecting on contemporary art work, defines bifocal vision—fusing Gertrude Stein's bipolar beauty-constitutions, and compressing Roland Barthes' readerly pleasure of *studium* and jouissance of *punctum* into one gaze (see Stein 1998, Barthes 1994)—as a view combining a restful, classicizing contemplation of a reassuring aesthetic ideal and a restless, contemporary struggle with an inventive, irritating, witty alternative anti-aesthetic (Suleiman 1994, 147). Speaking of contemporary women's writing's *body-texts*, I think that bifocal vision implies a parallel perception of the inherent locatedness within the 'restful' feminine literary tradition and of the 'restless,' ironic, feminist metatext, dislocating, destabilizing it—thus, allowing for the simultaneous interpretation of the ideologically prescribed, engendering, disciplining text of 'femininity' *written on the body* and of the self-consciously subversive feminist, daringly political, poetic, playful voices' *(re)writings from the heterogeneous body.* Whereas the myopic reader's sedentary satisfaction means to under-*stand* calmly the literary work within its own *episteme*, its own prisonhouse of fixed representation, the bifocal vision is an open double-take performed by a reader willing to come face to face with her own unmasked self mirrored in the window through which she watches the textual landscape passing by in a figurative literary journey, it is a revision by a nomadic reader willing to err, to deviate, to wander, to *run* risks, and to fly with the text. The theoretical premises of bifocality coincide with the Carterian narrative that is always a risky performance, in Carter's words "high-wire artists' "travel along the thread of the narrative [resembling] our life" (Carter 1993, 2). Although both the Carterian author and reader appear to embody metaphorically the high-wire

artist, as *NC*'s implied author is automaticallly identified with the winged aerialiste Fevvers, however I do not think that the ideal reader—in Boehm's words the "authorial audience"—must necessarily be a risk-taking rope-dancer. The bird-woman trapezist's performance may provide unique amusement from the direct bodily closeness of the myopic perspective, as seen from the theatre-box's first row by the ravished, naïve, 'lay' spectator, spellbound by the invitation to identification. But it may just as much enchant from the bird's eye's view's distance of the critically self-conscious, professional gaze of the expert voyeur, elite *connaisseur* of acrobatic arts, specific weight of female bodies and the nature of gravity. Yet the spectacle also carries charms of its own, when viewed from an 'in-between space' of 'now you see it, now you don't,' allowing for the bifocal pleasures of identification accompanied by self-reflection. One should note that before becoming a reader performing a bifocal (re)vision one is always already a myopic reader: one must pass through the stage of ideologically prescribed 'feminine' reading in order to provide a subversive feminist reading (that will inherently incorporate the feminine reading). The ambiguous, revisionary 'feminist-feminine' bifocal perspective reflects the paradox of parodic metafiction that has to invoke the very ideology it aims to subvert.

The Carterian "demythologizing business" reweaves fossilized (patriarchal) myths into innovative (feminist) texts, refills old bottles with new wine "especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottles explode" (Carter 1983, 71, 69)[84], dissects conventionally limiting representations of femininity to revive a 'new woman,' an ironically both monstrous *and* angelic, winged freak, a self-made female Frankenstein writing a 'patchwork' text (and body) of her own, reconstructed from bits and pieces of the lesser genres, despised styles, devalued themes of a marginalized feminine literary tradition. By 'feminine literary tradition,' I mean any piece of (but especially initial attempts at) women's writing that is in a essentialist logic biologically determined, by patriarchal literary institutions canonized, and through ideologically governed interpretive strategies conventionally decoded as sentimentally kitsch, over-emotionally confessional, incomprehensibly hysterical, odd modes of popular writing, speaking up in the conventionally engendered 'feminine' voice of the submissive 'angel in the house' or the 'screaming madwoman.'[85] Carter—as a womanwriter situated in a tradition of nineteenth century fellow female writers labelled as silly and sentimental, and of modernist women artists with voices coined irrational hysterics—speaks from within a patriarchally canonized authorial-position (risking the entrapment within marginalizing (heterosexual) scenarios of femininity), so that one lense of her bifocal view always focuses on ideologically inherently femininized literature, while the other looks for possibilities of re-vision. My aim is

to disentangle the Carterian metatext's subversions of all inevitable 'debilitating narratives of femininity' offered by patriarchal canon's esteemed master-texts and lesser, 'feminimized,' ('silly' or 'mad') mistress-texts alike (—conforming to canonization's engendering idelogical technology). I trace the irony of the text that performs—like Fevvers' spectacular body—clichés of femininity, in order to reveal the confidence trick, to read the difference in the deconstructive feminist, mocking repetition of the 'feminine' voice.

Linda Hutcheon quotes *NC* as a *par excellence* example of postmodern parody, Lorna Sage highlights the pastiche nature of Carter's text "littered with quotations and allusions" (Sage 1994b), and Joseph Bristow and Trev Lynn Broughton stress "the carnivalesque fun, the mordant wit, the biting irony that turn Shakespeare into a burlesque and bring Sade into the feminist bedroom [being] very much part of a serious intellectual stand that Carter took on Western culture" (Bristow-Broughton 1997, 8). Yet, I prefer to refer to Carter's subversive repetition of the 'feminine literary tradition' as a *tender irony, a knowing, metatextual, sisterly burlesque laughter shared* with women writers of the mimed feminine literary tradition in a comic text that is also a dialogic, intertextual *hommage* to the pioneers of women's literature bound by patriarchal limits. As Sarolta Marinovich-Resch notes, parody in women's writing is not necessarily a disgracing crude joke, a trivializing, ridiculizing caricature at the expense of the imitated text, but rather, contrarily, it challenges women's literary norms to renew and renovate, not to discredit them. Thus, it may ensure, from its shifting, dialogic, satiric perspective, a swipe at literary and social patriarchy by a parodic defence of reading and writing by women. (Marinovich-Resch 2002).[86] Although Butler, Hutcheon and Marinovich-Resch use the term 'parody' with reference to subversive, metafictional rewriting (of narratives of femininity), as for me, instead of parody—that I feel somewhat closer to the scorn- and contemptful, maliciously diminishing and derogatory, sometimes narcissistic "tendency wit" of caricature, satire and sarcasm—I find the concept of 'irony'—that is a deliberate dissembling or hiding of the actual case not to deceive but to achieve special, usually humorous rhetorical or artistic effects (Abrams 1993, 97)—more adequate to characterise the Carterian textual performance for several reasons. Firstly, irony's mocking self-understatement matches the trademark buffoonous maskings of self, while the ironic reversal equals the recurrant grotesque inversions. Secondly, the ironic perception invokes the bifocal perspective's interpretive pleasures, recalling in Wayne C. Booth's view, the optical illusion of the famous figure used by Wittgenstein and Gombrich, on which you see either a rabbit or a duck,[87] as the figure clicks back and forth in the process of recognition and reconstruction, surpassing the naïve pleasure of a single view (seeing only one figure), while

our attention focuses on the trickiness of the process, and our awareness of duplicity provides delights of ambiguity, resulting in the greatest intellectual and artistic achievement: "learning how to say both-and, not either-or, when we see that people and works of art are too complex for true or false tests" (Booth 1974, 128). Thirdly, the more tender "irony conveys an implicit *compliment* to the intelligence of readers" (Abrams 1993, 97) invited to play with the text to realize other meanings on metatextual levels, implying a tribute to all women attempting at the pen. Most importantly irony's harmless humour—although subtle, coded and occassionaly undisclosed—achieves its fullest effect when the tender ironic intention, the sisterly burlesque of the feminist self-freaking fusing democratic solidarity with carnivalesque mockery, as well as the laughter provoked are *shared* by past and present authors and readers alike in a *communal* pleasure of *laughing with* instead of laughing *at* others and oneself. In Carterian narratives the (self-)ironic textual performance incites a subversive and feminist laughter that signifies complicity, alliance, a shared wink, a common wisdom, and mutual healing.

i. A Silly Novel by an Ironic Lady Novelist

On its first reading, *NC* certainly recalls the stereotypical romance plot, well known from popular feminine literature or Hollywood movie-scenarios. A simple, rational young man meets an enigmatic, unreachable, fantastic female star, their mutual attraction promises a reassuring romantic reunion, yet—according to the obligatory detour of the Brooksian plot, (Brooks 1984, 90-112) in order to guarantee the maximal pleasure of the text—they have to encounter several adventures, affront evil adversaries aiming to separate them, and surmount numerable obstacles, misunderstandings, including their own blindness, before the hero can solve the waiting heroine's secret, save her for good, so that their love can reach fulfilment in the compulsory happy-ending of the socially sanctioned marriage, where they can be each other's, and live happily ever after. However, the close reader of Carter's text surely reveals how the traditional feminine romance plot, referred to by Gilbert and Gubar as "the Pamela plot" (Gilbert-Gubar 1979, 69) is multiply subverted. It is the apparently immature young man who is repeatedly saved (from the tiger, the Strongman, the clowns and the Shaman), healed, and cared for by the much wiser heroine, who in her grotesque corporeal reality is not in the least way an ideally immaculate or self-subordinating 'feminine' woman. Her enigma cannot be solved: her victorious laughter at their final reunion makes the hero wonder whether it is not *he* who is the butt of *her* joke. *NC* rewrites the traditional feminine *Künstlerroman*, as its heroine is always already a (woman) writer gifted with creative imagination from the beginning and speaking up in the polyphonic voice of (two Scherezades, Fevvers and Lizzie) the authoress who has always been, in the fashion of Deleuze and Guttari, 'a legion.' The

feminine *Bildungsroman* is also subverted by its self-proliferation in the vertiginous multiplication of embedded life-narratives of marginalized creatures (Annie, Grace, Jenny and Esmeralda from Ma Nelson's brothel, Fanny Four Eyes, Sleeping Beauty, Wilthshire Wonder, Albert/ Albertina, Cobwebs and Toussaint from the Museum of Woman Monsters, Mignon, Princess of Abyssinia from the Circus, Olga from the Panopticon) with whom the heroine feels solidarity and whose sister-texts are embedded in her cross-genre, self-fictionalizing, mock-autobiographical narrative. Ironically, Fevvers' *Bildung* is made to be recorded by a rational, male journalist *auktor* becoming "the amanuensis of all those whose tales we've yet to tell him, the histories of those woman who would otherwise go down nameless and forgotten, erased from history as if they had never been" (285), and whose authoritative pen is teasingly directed by the oral, private, half-magic, half–real autobiografiction of the stereotypically silly *and* hysteric, yet self-reflexive, even feminist, female writer, who aims at subversive canon reevaluations. Conventional *feminine romance*'s idealization, moralizing, and hierarchical gender structuring are repeated ironically only to be subverted: the heroine is heavenly sublime yet also abject grotesque, she is angelic yet always a woman on top, patriarchally sanctified values and norms (femininity, motherhood (21, 283), marriage (21, 39, 46, 230, 280, 281, 282), nature (61), normality (220), christianity (176, 239), humanity (110), law (211)) are demythologized in a carnivalesque, metamorphic tone in which kitsch sentimental exaltation (of traditional romance values) turns into overplayed hysteric excess transformed into a subversively (self-)ironic metatext commenting on the novel's own silly 'happy ending,' mocking feminine romance and radical utopian feminist traditions alike.

> 'The Prince who rescues the Princess from the dragon's lair is always forced to marry her, whether they've taken a liking to one another or not. That's the custom. And I don't doubt that custom will apply to the trapeze artist who rescues the clown. The name of this custom is a "happy ending".'
> 'Marriage,' repeated Fevvers, in a murmur of awed distaste. But after a moment, she perked up.
> 'Oh, but Liz—think of his malleable look. As if a girl could mould him any way she wanted. Surely he'll have the decency to give himself to me, when we meet again, not to expect the vice versa! Let him hand himself over to my safekeeping, and I will transform him....I'll sit on him. I'll hatch him out, I'll make a new man of him. I'll make him into the New Man, in fact, fitting mate for the New Woman, and onward we'll march hand in hand into the New Century-'
> Lizzie detected a note of rising hysteria in the girl's voice" (281)

The style Fevvers uses certainly recalls that of the popular feminine romances' heroines, whom their authors intend to characterize—in George Eliot's ironic words from 1856—by a "general propensity to make speeches, and to rhapsodize at some length," a unique gift of

"amazingly eloquent" and "amazingly witty" conversations, the linguistic genius of a "polking polyglott, a Creuzer in crinoline", picking up foreign languages "with the same aerial facility that the butterfly sips nectar," the creativity of a "superior authoress, whose pen moves in a quick decided manner when she is composing," lofty monologues in a philosophical, moralizing yet enthusiastic, high-spirited, wildly romantic "Ossianic fashion," fascinating and silencing even men (Eliot 1985, 518, 520, 522). George Eliot, an elite, rational, severe critic of "silly novels by lady novelists" labels their feminine style annoyingly affectating, sentimental, superficial, hypocritical, hysteric, hyperbolic and talkative, thus reinforcing all the clichés of the stereotypical concept of 'feminine discourse' (see Yagello 1987, Vasváry 2003). The patriarchally naturalized (biologically predetermined) cliché of 'silly feminine style' is often associated with the engendered concept[88] of 'kitsch'[89] that is—in Abraham A. Moles' definition—(also) disfunctional, rationally inadequate, superficial, excessive, capricious, sensorily totalitarian, yet popular, mediocre and comfortably comprehensible. Accordingly, on first seeing the winged aerialiste, the male gaze of Walser immediately (mis)interprets her as perfect embodiment of femininity, synonymous with kitsch. ("On the stage of Alhambra, when the curtain went up, there she was, prone in a feathery heap...behind tinsel bars...how kitsch" (14)). However, the spectator-reader must realize that the bird-woman embodies "a bird in a gilded cage" via an ironically exaggerated spectacle with wink, turning silly, submissive femininity and frightening, female freakishness, as well as her ideologically available discursive self-representations into subversive, self-reflexive, carnivalesque grotesque performances. As the excessive accumulation of commonplaces of feminine style and overplayed clichés of kitsch in Fevvers' pathetic, prophetic, poetic utterances suggest, the stereotypically 'silly feminine language' is merely staged, in a spectacular performance with a finale of brief, mockingly disillusioning remarks, implicit (self-)ironic metatextual comments of the polyphonic woman writer, who denaturalizes and deconstructs from a bifocal perspective, via a playfully borderline, (both silly and self-ironic), balancing aerialiste-discourse the ideologically engendered concepts of feminine (or phallogocentric) language.

> 'And once the world has turned on its axle so that the new dawn can dawn, then, ah, then! All the women will have wings, the same as I. This young woman in my arms, whom we found tied hand and foot with the grisly bonds of ritual, will suffer no more of it, she will tear off her mind forg'd manacles, will rise up and fly away. The dolls' house doors will open, the brothels will spill forth their prisoners, the cages, gilded or otherwise, all over the world, in every land, will let forth their inmates singing together the dawn chorus of the new, the transformed-'
> 'It's going to be more complicated than that,' interpolated Lizzie...

> But her daughter swept on, regardless, as if intoxicated with vision.
> On that bright day when I am no more a singular being but, warts and all the female paradigm, no longer an imagined fiction but a plain fact—then he will slap down his notebooks, bear witness to me and my prophetic role. Think of him, Lizzie, as one who carries the evidence—'
> 'Cushie-cushie-coo,' said Lizzie to the restless baby." (285-286)

Fevvers' emphatic re-enactment of the silliest, 'most feminine' texts of the feminine romance tradition signals contemporary woman writer's tender irony on her own limited location within an ideologically-canonically constituted corpus of inherently femininized-devalued subjectivities and writings—provoking her parodic and political repetitions of femininity's debilitating discursive (self-)representations 'with a difference,' from a revisionary, metareflexive, bifocal perspective, aiming to 'subvert from within' that which has been 'marginalized from within.' The aerialiste discovering an enabling parallel between stereotypically feminine kitsch and subversively self-freaking body-text, is able to produce her own excessive, antagonistic, 'feminist (meta-)feminine' text of pleasure. While the kitsch-work's self-conscious metaperspective resembles the carnivalesque's bifocal consideration of limits and trangressions, its delirious expenditure recalls the surrealists' self-destabilizing text-flow. Thus, in Carter the (overwritten romance of the mock)'silly lady novelist' is complemented by an (equally self-ironic) 'mad woman writer,' embodying the visionary hysteric, venerated model of the Breton's and Aragon's manifesto, and the patriarchal canon's other stereotypical trope of the authoress, who, this time, is characterised by "much madness" carrying the "divinest sense to a discerning eye" (Dickinson 1994, 7) in a carnivalesque imbroglio's subversive creativity and creative subversion.

ii. A Carnivalesque Histrionic Hysteric Text

Hysteria, an ideologically engendered, biologically determined 'female malady,' refers to psychic conflicts finding their symbolic expression manifested in corporeal symptoms, resulting in a 'text written from the semioticized body.' But, in patriarchal readings, the somatized text produced fails to be interpreted as an independent narrative of self-expression. The hysteric body-text—along with the considerable corpus of 'feminine' writings affiliated with it—is primarily associated with the uncontrollable, abject body troubled by its wandering womb ('hyster' or 'uterus' constituting the etymological root of the word 'hysteria'), its repressed yet re-emerging libidinal drives and excessive desires, patriarchaly devalued as indecipherable delirious ravings, irrational frenzies, phobic or phantasmatic association streams unable to 'mature into' symbolic representation. Identified with pathological corporeality, women's symptomatic writing conventionally can only be solved by a male

psychoanalyst-reader, who, in the process of healing meaning-fixation, unveils, objectifies, reads, and erases her and her mad writing on/from her body alike, so as to re-write her conforming to his scenario. The patriarchal cure of the madwoman (as propagated from Hippocrates to Freud) wants to eliminate the differing symptom marking her body, by re-engendering and re-interpellating her into the socially prescribed feminine subject position, through the resurrection of her 'natural' willingness to marry, to submit to masculine desires, to return the kiss of Herr K., to discipline and shut her body, and thus, end her madness, her body writing, and successfully become a 'real' woman: that is feminine, normal(ized), submissive, silent, unmarked and non-writing. (see Freud 1993, Moi 1990, Bronfen 1998)

NC is set in 1899, an era when Charcot's posessed patients are displayed in the Salpetrière hospital (1889), when Anna O's malady and her "talking cure" are made public by Breuer (1895), when Dora's case disclosed brings fame to Freud (1901). It is the golden-age of silenced madwomen giving birth to a legitimate male scientific discourse inspired by her hysteric body-text that becomes the hidden other text, with a metaphor "the madwoman in the attic," of psychoanalysis. In fact, the mock-historical novel claims that Fevvers, a model of Lautrec and all surrealists, a fiancé of Alfred Jarry and a friend of Colette, "in Vienna,[...]deformed the dreams of that entire generation who would immediately commit themselves wholeheartedly to psychoanalysis" (11), and consequently, a true (simulating) daughter of her times, Fevvers apparently embodies several hysterical symptoms so as to stage adequately her patriarchal era's pathologized woman becoming a public spectacle. In Madame Schreck's museum of woman monsters—uncannily recalling Charcot's "museum of living pathology" (Bronfen 1998, 174) at Salpetrière—as in other stages of her career, she acts out the hysteric, "readily appear[ing] to be an arch simulator, deceiver, and seductress" (Bronfen 1998, x), performing simulacras of pathologic femininity. In the hysterical scenario, her theatrical(ized) emotional crisis are paroxysmal symptoms, her winged hunchback walk is abnormal movement due to psychosomatic partial paralysis, her aerialiste balancing and somersaults are abnormal motor movements and convulsions, her wings are phantasmatic bodily protuberances or hysterogenic zones, her recurring spreading of her (pseudo)wings is a hysterical conversion, a neurotic defence mechanism against repressed anxiety. Fevvers' performance of femininity enacts a *par-excellence* example of hysterical personality: she is egocentric, histrionic, emotionally unstable, a pathologically excessive, 'hyper-feminine' yet 'unreal' woman, embodying sublime transcendental femininity tainted with freakish corporeality. On the other hand, Fevvers is also the New Woman of the new century, who refuses to be silenced through reviving a stereotypical trope of woman writer (much more

dangerous than the submissive angel and her silly text): that of the madwoman speaking in subversive (m)other-tongues. Fevvers' storyteller persona indeed recalls the hysteric patient talking herself out in a disorganized speech to the analyst-audience making notes of her mental creations. Yet Walser is a mere scriptor directed by her voice, there is no need for his healing, corrective psychoanalysis, as Fevvers' narrative bears independent pleasures of its own. Fevvers completely rejects the hysterical symptoms of aphonia, aphasia and amnesia. It is the "note of rising hysteria in [her] voice" (281), her words' vibration, the dynamic movement of her rhythmic, antagonistic, (vulnerable-vulgar, kitschy-hysteric), excessively passionate, overflowing periodic sentences 'infecting' the Carterian text, which mimes hysteric convulsions and performs a textual-pantomime creating a histrionic hysteric style—a corporeally convulsive *yet* highly verbal, even 'oververbalized,' ironic text of the 'wondering womb.' Fevvers, the arch-simulator stages herself in a spasmodic text as a riddle in constant spectacular self-deconstructive metamorphosis, a hysteric sham, dragging the heterogeneized 'subject in process' from dressing-room to sea, sky, earth and even the wonderland behind the mirror, in a nomadic subject's journey, almost too fast to follow—as in the followings:

> Fevvers yawned with prodigious energy, opening up a crimson maw the size of that of a basking *shark*, taking in enough air to lift a *Montgolfier*, and then she stretched herself suddenly and hugely, extending every muscle as a *cat* does, until it seemed she intended to fill up all the *mirror*, all the room with her *bulk*. (52) (*my emphasis*)
> Fevvers pushed back her chair, rose up on tiptoe and lifted towards the ceiling a face which suddenly bore an expression of the most heavenly beatitude, face of an angel in a Sunday school picture-book, a remarkable transformation. She crossed her arms on her massive bust and the bulge in the back of her satin dressing-gown began to heave and bubble. Cracks appeared in the old satin. Everything appeared to be about to burst out and take off. But the loose curls quivering on top of her high-piled chignon already brushed a stray drifting cobweb from the smoke discoloured ceiling... (42)

Fevvers appears as the histrionic hysteric, winking at her audience in an ecstatic fit of the joyously destabilizing, convulsive text: "Am I fact? Or am I fiction? Am I what I know I am? Or am I what he thinks I am?" (290). Her theatricalized, throbbing, paroxysmal discourse reflects how her irrational performance's consciously convulsive, 'aerial grotesque' movements mock reason and tradition shocking the sceptic, down-to-earth spectator.

> She gathered herself together, rose up on tiptoe and gave a mighty shrug, in order to raise her shoulders. Then she brought down her elbows, so that the tips of her pin feathers of each wing met in the air above her headdress, At the first crescendo, she jumped.
> Yes, jumped. Jumped up to catch the dangling trapeze, jumped up some thirty feet in a single, heavy bound, transfixed the while upon the arching white sword of the limelight. The invisible wire that must have hauled her up remained invisible. She caught hold of the

> trapeze with one hand. Her wings throbbed, pulsed, then whirred, buzzed and at last began to beat steadily on the air they disturbed so much that the pages of Walser's notebook ruffled over and he temporarily lost his place, had to scramble to find it again, almost displaced his composure but managed to grab tight hold of his scepticism just as it was about to blow over the ledge of the press box. (16)

Through a feminist revision of the 'female malady' (propagated by Gilbert and Gubar (1979), Cixous and Clément (1986), Elizabeth Bronfen (1998), Elaine Showalter and Dianne Hunter (1997) among others), hysteria becomes a textual engine carrying subversive discursive potentials addressed against patriarchal thought and its phallogocentric-mysogynist representations. Fevvers identifies with the revolutionary hysteric who rejects the homogenized cultural identity, the silent or superficial symbolization offered to her, through translating herself into another idiom that transforms her cultural discontent into somatic manifestation. She projects her dis-ease and (des)ire upon her body, and converts this symptomatic bodily transcription into a somatized verbal language of her own, testing the limits of cultural embodiment, identity-frames and symbolic representation alike. Fevvers' histrionic performance acts out the hysteric, described by Dianne Hunter as a "multilingual being," cleverly manipulating discourse, finding her own voice, and creating her stimulating, sympathetic listener audience (Hunter 1997, 268). As Gilbert and Gubar claim in their groundbreaking 1979 study, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, the display of the madwoman's monstrous autonomy signals the female impulse to refuse to be killed into silence, to escape social and literary confinement through strategic re-definitions of self. Hysteric language simultaneously reveals the vulnerability of symbolic representation and of social identity. Fevvers, by fusing 'silly lady novelists'' and 'raving madwomanwriters'' marginalized, hystericized discourses, over-identifies with the repressed 'other,' acts out devalued-debilitating 'femininity' to the extremes, and mockingly mimes (semioticized) symptoms of female dis-eases. Her aim is to stage the performative quality and political potentials of feminized, pathologized syndromes, in order to "negotiate the interface between mimesis, imagination, representation and deception" (Bronfen 1998, 105) and to reveal the hysteric's subversive ability to simulate, fascinate, distress, fool, seduce, and overall to subvert.[90] Thus, 'hysteria's grand fallacy' (see Bronfen 1998), like Fevvers' histrionic hysteric narrative-performance, recalls Butler's spectacularly parodic re-enactment of gender—troubled via the *différance* of its politically invested, self-subverting meta-text. Ironically, Fevvers excessive, self-masking performance of femininity coincides with what Stephen Heath calls the "hysteric's failed masquerade:" missing her identity as a Woman, she refuses to play the game of 'being' or 'not having' the

phallus, she simply rejects not the symbolical *Phallus* as a supreme signifier of an impossible identity (Heath 1989, 51), and rewrites patriarchal scenarios in *père-versive* ways.

In Fevvers' interpretation, hysteria is a *commedia dell'arte* performance (see Benvenuto 1997), a carnivalesque subversion authored by the self-spectacularized, -freaked hysterical body. According to Allon White, the hysteric discourse signifies an impossible, isolated, insane attempt at the private, phobic (re)articulation of a repressed, marginalized, fragmented carnival-practice and its lost communal, regenerative pleasures. However, the ambiguous aerialiste's excessive narrative has it both ways: instead of the broken fragments of a carnival debris or debilitating hysteria, the text embraces total carnivalesque celebration and unlimited hysteric festival within the catharctic sphere of the circus. The narrative even stages hysterical attacks' *clownism phase*, imitating animals, compulsively repeating circus scenes, and performing the craziest capers, somersaults and grimaces (semioticized) (White 1989, 159).

The birdwoman's narrative flight recalls Cixous and Clément's feminist manifesto's *newly born woman* who can "fly and flee into a new heaven and new earth of her own invention" in her text vibrated by hysteric convulsions, witches' flights, mad tarantella- and vertiginous rope- dance, (Cixous-Clément 1986, xiv). It performs acrobatic somersaults, grotesque contorsions, clownesque grimaces, and overall laughing fits to outmanoeuvre the symbolic order in a Feverish text's histrionic hysteric festival of mocking metamorphoses.

iii. "stories of the exotic, of the marvellous, of laughter and tears and thrills and all"

The feverish narrative performance staged in *NC* cunningly surpasses the ideologically contained carnival's 'scheduled,' safeguarded subversion, associated with female attempts at self-expression limited by the unsurmountable patriarchal representational system incorporating and intimidating all attempts at alternative meaning formations. In Carter's novel, Fevvers' mock-sentimental and histrionic-hysteric, 'self-carnivalizing,' freaked feminine language gradually embraces the patriarchal narrative authored by the masculine (rational, pragmatic) journalist, Walser. As Paul Mags claims, Carterian women put men through every circus hoop they themselves have jumped, from beneath their false eyelashes flashing alarmingly-seductively all the vertiginously luring possibilities of the postmodern text (Mags 1997), and of women's writing. Although the novel's intra-textual author is Walser who, after his interview with Fevvers (Book 1), decides to write as an incognito correspondent a "series of inside stories of the exotic, of the marvellous, of laughter and tears and thrills and all" (90) "invit[ing all readers] to spend a few nights at the circus" with him (91), he does not have a direct voice of his own. Instead, Fevvers' first person singular, mock-autobiographical narrative voice and an omniscient, mocking, metatextual narrative voice take

turns at weaving the text, to call to life its implied author*ess*, a grotesque winged aerialiste. As the overplayed (mock-pathologized or devalued) feminine authorial voice increasingly infects the text, canonization's engendering is challenged via a piece of women's writing ironically (pretending to be) authored by a man, Walser invited to waltz with and *as* women.

The verbally talented Walser (9) fond of "cataclysmic shocks because he loved to hear his bones rattle" (10) readily subjects himself to Fevvers' performance unaware that her narrative would change his story. As if a premonition, her first spreading her wings disturbs the air "so much that the pages of Walser's notebook [ruffle] over and he temporarily los[es] his place" (16). Walser acts like a member of the spell-bound audience identifying with the actress, his reactions mime those of the winged star, he is becoming increasingly irrational, hysterical (feels composure almost displaced (16)), kitschy and sentimental (feels "more and more like a kitten tangling up in a ball of wool it had never intended to unravel" (40)). He simulates all symptoms of the aerial grotesque being, writing on his body the hysterical text of iterated difference: his clown-grimaces at little Ivan repeat Fevvers' terrifying, fascinating effect on him, his wounded shoulder prophecies Fevvers' broken wing, and most importantly, his typing, "flying fingers" (97) embody her subversive corporeal performance and narrative flight. Walser's personality-change coincides with the transformation of his language entailed by the two mock-Scheherezades, Fevvers and Lizzie, who direct his pen and destabilize his subject, dis-membering his 'stable' masculine writerly-self via their (mis)rememberings. ("The hand that followed their dictations across the page obediently as a little dog no longer felt as if it belonged to him. It flapped at the hinge of the wrist." (78)) The infection in the sentence breeds[91] fast: when Fevvers interrupting Walser's report writes in his notebook with a "*f*ine, *f*irm, *f*lowing Italic hand" (*my emphasis*), on reading it Walser immediately exclaims "Good God" in fittingly alliterating, emotionally excessive words (78). On Walser's joining the circus, the sceptic journalist is replaced by the charmed clown masquerading his newly discovered, self-deconstructive, heterogenous identity, as well as a verbal drag, a virtuoso linguistic play of polyphonic, mock-feminine (silly and hysteric) laughing text matching the spectacular feverish narrative of the beloved winged woman.

> *Yes! Built as St Petersburg was at the whim of a tyrant who wanted his memory of Venice to take form again in stone on a marshy shore at the end of the world under the most inhospitable of skies, this city, put together, brick by brick by poets, charlatans, adventurers and crazed priests, by slaves, by exiles, this city bears that Prince's name, which is the same name as the saint who holds the keys of heaven...St Petersburg, a city built of hubris, imagination, and desire...its boulevards of peach and vanilla stucco dissolve in mists of autumn...* in the sugar syrup of nostalgia, acquiring the elaboration of

> artifice, I am inventing an imaginary City as I go along. Towards such a city the baboushka's pig now trots (96-97)
> Walser reread his copy. The city precipitated him towards hyperbole, never before had he bandied about so many adjectives. Walser-the-clown, it seemed, could juggle with the dictionary with a zest that would have abashed Walser-the-foreign-correspondent. He chuckled... (98)

While Fevvers' native town is London, the home of confidence trick, distinguished by St Paul's cathedral resembling a freakishly half-breasted amazon (36), the place of Walser's rebirth is St Petersburg, the home of the famous Russian circus, "a city stuck with lice and pearls, impenetrably concealed behind a strange alphabet, a beautiful, rancid, illegible city" (98) apt to inspire Walser's linguistic turn, opening up gates to an empathic, enthusiastic text of pleasure. Walser's textual metamorphosis is directed by Fevvers. The once self-confident journalist falls for the winged giantess, who dictates to him, stuffs a handful of cold cream in his mouth to silence him (143), seduces him with her narrative, and makes him realize in a state of mental tumult that he has been duped, turned into a *real* clown, who with a broken heart and arm "cannot write or type" (145). The reporter's disillusioned recognition on his being deprived of his pen and profession at the middle of the novel (Book 2, chapter 6) is followed by the most poetic, carnivalesque passages on the circus, a subversive text authored perhaps by the new Walser, a feverish clown, infected by the freakish aerialiste's narrative.

> Brisk, bright, wintry morning, under a sky that mimics a bell of blue glass so well it looks as if it would ring out glad tidings at the lightest blow of a fingernail. A thick rime of frost everywhere, giving things a festive, tinsel trim. The rare Northern sunlight makes up in brilliance for what it lacks in warmth, like certain nervous temperaments. [...] Amid laughter, horse-play and snatches of song, rosy-cheeked, whistling stable-boys stamp their feet, blow their fingers, dash hither and thither with bales of hay and oats on their shoulders, sacks of vegetables for the elephants, hands of bananas for the apes, or heave stomach-churning pitchforkfuls of dung on to a stack of soiled straw. [...] A lugubrious gypsy strays into the courtyard to add the wailing of his fiddle to the clatter of boot-heels on cobbles, the babel of tongues, the perpetual, soft jangle as the elephants within the building agitate their chains, the sound that reminds the Colonel, always with a shock of pleasure, of the outrageous daring of his entire enterprise. (146)

The pragmatic newsman gives birth to the clown-poet, departs from his disciplined subject position, patriarchal masternarratives and masculinized style, and experiences the vertiginious sense of the self-freaking being's limitless "freedom that lies behind the mask, within dissimulation, the freedom to juggle with being, and, indeed, with the *language* which is vital to our being, that lies at the heart of burlesque" (103). Throughout his illuminating journey with the circus, a Siberian train-crash turns Walser from 'professionally ecstatic' clown into a permanently delirious Shaman's disciple, a concussed, amnesiac, aphasiac

apprentice-sorcier, who speaks hysterically in tongues, considers the fragments of his English an astral discourse, babbles beating his drum, and duly deepens his familiarity with the language of the other. Thus, when Fevvers finally finds him, he is ready for the interview with her. After his apprenticeship in the highest forms of confidence trick, having waltzed with the giantess winged aerialiste, screamed with the clowns, and raved with the Shaman, Walser, at the end of the novel, can make his counts, concluding that all his life, as the text, happened to him in the third person, with his watching but not living it. He can utter "I" for the first time in the text: "and now, hatched out of the shell of unknowing by a combination of a blow on the head and a sharp spasm of erotic ecstasy, I shall have to start all over again" (294). Tellingly, the rebirth of the patriarchal word is accomplished by sharing the novel's final and initial subversive female voice: the "spiralling tornado of Fevvers' laughter" (295).

I agree with Beth A. Boehm claiming that Walser is the reconstructed reader who abandons his naturalised androcentric worldview, masculinized bias, and normalized interpretive technologies or conventions. With his final-opening questions addressed to Fevvers (and perhaps to himself), "What is your name? Have you a soul? Can you love?" (291), he reenacts the beginning of the narrative. This time, Walser, whom Fevvers "takes under her wings" (Mags 1997, 185), appears as an appreciative, cooperative, Barthesian *writerly reader*, prepared to make love and jouissance with the text. (see Barthes 1975, 1977) The reliability of the narrative voice, the credibility of the story are mockingly questioned, readerly expectations and representational transparency are playfully challenged as Walser, the *reader* of Fevvers' undecipherable body, is invited to dance, to unite with the self-destabilizing text. Walser, as the *waltzing reader* is curious, surmising the ambiguous polysemy of Fevvers' narrative-, corporeal-performance as either/both hoax or/and miracle. He is ready to take the alternative textual entry of the active co-producer of changing, plural meanings in a narrative that is seduction, spectacle and a comic play in one. His opposite, the cruel, voyeuristic collector Grand Duke embodies the old-fashioned, archetypal 'masculine' reader who seeks to consume a single, final, phallic meaning in a canonically stabilized work that can be mastered. He can interpret Fevvers' slogan "Only a bird in a gilded cage" only literally, threatening to bewitch and entrap Fevvers in the form of a miniaturized artificial bird in a cage symbolizing stereotypical femininity doomed to silence, silly small-talk or insanity. On the contrary, the *homo-ludens-reader* waltzing with the narrative remarks the (self-)ironic, metatextual, merry side of the winged woman's narrative as well. Thus, the limiting clichés of the domineering *phallogocentric discourse* violently incorporating and silencing weaker *écriture féminine* are demythologized, as the strict newsman becoming clown-poet enters the

self-freakingly feminized narrative, sharing the confidence trickster feminist authoress' pleasures, ready to fly with her text,.

iv. The Portrait of the Artist as a Freakish Winged Aerialiste

Fevvers' carnivalesque life narrative (constituting the novel's first part) is told to the objective *reporter* addressed as a 'waltzing' 'writerly' *reader*, irresistibly transformed by the freakish duo of the winged giantess and her midget stepmother, this twin-set of "two Scheherezades, both impacting a thousand stories into the single night" (40), charming Walser by facing him with their polyphonic, proliferating *women writer*ly selves. As Carter claims, Fevvers' final declaration, "I fooled you" (295) is a statement on the nature of fiction and on her own aim to invite readers to "invent other fictions, things that might have happened[...]to take one further step into the fictionality of the narrative" (Haffenden 1985, 90-91). The waltzing reader notes that Fevvers' slogan "Is she fact or is she fiction?" is a self-reflexive question of the implied author*ess*, like the descriptions of Fevvers' ambivalent (cavernous-celestial, siren- or fishwife-like) voice[92] are metatextual comments on Carter's own heterogeneous text (dis)organised by excessive ambiguities. The winged aerialiste's voice turns out to be that of the woman writer newly-being-born (hatched?) in her subversive text.

The artist's aerialiste persona 'balances along the lines' of numerous critics. According to Sarah Gamble, Fevvers' final laughter is a metafictional comment in the form of an "aerial double somersault" (Gamble 1997, 169). In James Brockway's view, the winged woman "walks the tightrope" on discourse, while Paulina Palmer wonders where the future "flight of fiction" would take her (Palmer 1987, 201). Mary Russo argues that the portrait of the artist as a young mannequin ends with Winged Victory keen on learning how to "fly in a high flying rhetoric" (Russo 1995, 170). For me, the winged aerialiste freak supported by a midget stepmother personifies the woman writer located in a marginalized female literary tradition of sister-texts fuelled by solidarity, lacking anxieties of influence or of authorship (see Gilbert-Gubar 1979), writing from within yet subversively against their devaluing 'othering' by patriarchal literary institution's canonization, providing in the "voice of a fake medium" a parody of essentialist and exclusive concepts of engendered discourse, and doing revision from her unstable, metamorphic yet solid, located aerialiste-position, in-between earth and sky.

Ironically, a double of the aerialiste implied author is personified by the baboushka, a deeply embedded female narrator, whose voice opens the second part, entitled *Petersburg* as well as Walser's report on his nights at the circus. The baboushka's humble bow, her genuflection, her hands "slowly part[ing] and com[ing] together again just as slowly, in a

hypnotically reiterated gesture that was as if she were about to join her hands in prayer" and starting to part before touching (95) repeat the movements of a rope dancer (though slowed down excessively in a grotesque way). Her never finished tale, her "constantly repeated interruption of [action and sentence] sequences" are interpreted by the unhatched Walser as the drama of the dignified hopelessness of a wretched old woman. Nevertheless the baboushka's repeatedly restarted, unfinished tale, told to grandson Little Ivan on the little pig succeeds in marking both Walser's narrative (""I am inventing an imaginary city as I go along. Towards such a city, the baboushka's pig now trots." (97)) and influencing the flow of the novel (introducing the circus director's 'porkine assistant' Sybil into the text: "If one pig trotted off to St Petersburg to pray, another less pious worker traveled to Petersburg for fun and profit betweeen silk sheets in a first class *wagon lit.*(98)) The "*infinite* incompletion" (Carter's emphasis) of the baboushka's work, suggesting that "woman's work is never done" (95) recalls the aerialiste's gravity-defying rope-dancing in the in-between space of mid-air, in so far as it metaphorically stands for the infinite possibilities of women's writing resisting final meanings in favor of a pleasurably challenging balancing in-between inter-texts.

The aerialiste-text, as Fevvers' voice, balances on the thin dividing line between seriousness and ridicule, repetition and subversion, as conventional stereotypes of feminine literature (poetic clichés, lofty tone, histrionic style, sentimental topoi) are reenacted to be disclosed as mere mannerisms, semantically incongruous with the brute materiality of the represented (a)women's bodily reality. Fevvers and Carter's text, "both grand and vulgar," refuse being 'down-to-earth' by revelling in the "sloppy second-hands of intertextuality," the "smells of carnival," and primarily "many representations of physicality" (Tucker 1998, 2), which—through a tricky 'narrative flight'—allow for corporeality's unspeakable presence to be re-presented in shallow clichés of the sublime, which nevertheless turn, via their excessive accumulation, deeply poetic, only to transform self-ironically into ridiculous commonplaces again, in a 'high-flying' rhetorics' textual feats duping and amusing all.

The aerialiste is an enabling emblem of feminist empowerment and alternative creativity. In psychoanalytic terms, the aerialiste *defying gravity* triumphs over a primary trauma preceding symbolization, and succeeds in re-experiencing the paradisiac, free-floating intrauterine bodily space of the Kristevian, tempting-threatening, sublime-abject, maternal *chora*, (Kristeva 1985, 22-30) while, paradoxically, this preverbal all-engulfing 'otherness' subverting symbolization becomes the textual-engine of the nascent aerialiste authoress' 'revolutionary poetic,' vertiginous text[93]. Accordig to Paul Bouissac, semiotician of the circus, the air is a space of negotiation for the aerialiste—less of an 'angel in the house' than a

working girl in the air—that highlights her normally concealed corporeality amidst simulated spectacle, and in the air, defying gravity, negotiates space from which alternative representative spaces for heterogeneous, somersaulting identities may be articulated (Russo 1995, 176). Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément—elaborating on Mauss and Lévi-Strauss—identify the women in the circus, female "carnies, drifters, jugglers and acrobats" with the subversively speaking sorceress, the ecstatic hysteric, the outsider afflicted with a dangerous yet productive symbolic mobility, affecting the very structure whose lacunae it reflects, and simulating imaginary transitions, embodying self-contradictory syntheses, suggesting subversive configurations enabling a return to the other wor(l)ds of childhood (Cixous-Clément 1975, 7). Carter's winged freak aerialiste seems to embody this subversive figure of Cixous and Clément's '*newly born woman* writer,' who inventively fuses childplay, witchcraft, hysteric frenzy, risky rope-dance and revisionary flight, using their transgressive potentials to generate somatized, self-ironic body-texts of her own.

Tellingly, the image of the 'womanwriter as aerialiste' meets in a trademark Carterian catachresis with one of her favorite self-ironic authorial personas: the yarn spinning, tall-tale-telling 'wolf in grandma's clothing' (Sage 1994b, 2). The fantastic freak Fevvers as writing winged woman, "her *white teeth are big and carnivorous as those of Red Riding Hood's grandmother*[...]kisses her free hand to all. [and] She folds up her quivering *wings* with a number of shivers, moues and grimaces as if she were putting away a naughty *book*" (18) (*my emphasis*). *NC*'s narrative is (self-de)constructed as a spectacular performance, a tricky play, a subversive seduction, a "naughty book" flying with the quivering wings of the giantess aerialiste Fevvers who embodies the wayward woman-writer weaving her whimsy body-text.

4. A Narrative of Laughter and Laughing Narratives

NC overabounds with *somatizations* of texts and *semioticizations* of bodies on multiple levels: along with freakish grotesque bodies producing carnivalesque languages, and coincidences of spectacular corporeal- and textual- performances, laughing bodies generate narratives fuelled by laughter. *NC*, a comic novel melts the vulgar raillery of common folk, the Cockney heehaw with the winking, intertextual allusions of the literary cultivated elite, the subtle irony of an academic feminist, and a metatextual humour of her own kind. I analyse the birdwoman Fevvers' delirious and democratic, carnivalesque 'feminist' laughter and the clown Buffo's frightened and frightening, disillusioned, compensatory laughter as two sides of the same coin: narrative-fuelling hysterical laughters embodied respectively by Renaissance or Romantic reformulations of the grotesque freak. But, unlike feminist critics (Paulina Palmer,

Sarah Gamble, Mary Russo, or Marina Warner) stressing the textual-sexual politics of the winged woman's joy, or Tamás Bényei, who claims the clowns' laughter to be the blindspot and engine of the text, I argue that the major motor moving the freakish bodies and their languages is an*other* laughter, the most subversive of all: an omnipresent, supplementary, frenetic fit of infantile laughter that pulsates in the gaps and at the very heart of the text.

i. The Winged Woman's Laughter

Fevvers' spectacular, confidence-trickster corporeal-, textual- performances resist gravity, mock spectatorial expectations, relativize regimes of truth, demythologize feminine stereotypes, subvert limiting representational systems and disciplined subjectivity to peak in her final laughter. Ironically, Fevvers' laughter on the novel's last page, signals, instead of a narrative closure, an infinite proliferation of playful meanings, newly generated subversions performed by self-freaking bodies convulsed with laughter. The "enormous joke," "giant comedy," or "spiraling tornado" of Fevvers' laughter proves to be irresistible and infectious, resulting in an overwhelming merriment of/in the text, resonated by a choir of intra-textual giggles, chuckles and smiles involving nearly all the characters, while tickling and teasing the reader invited to join in the universally celebratory, carnivalesque laughter.

> Her *laughter* spilled out of the window and made the tin ornaments on the tree outside the god-hut shake and tinkle. She *laughed so loud* that the baby in the Shaman's cousin's house heard her waved its little fists in the air and *laughed delightedly too.* Although he did not understand the joke that convulsed the baby, the Shaman caught the infection and *started to giggle.* The bear panted sympathetically, he *would have laughed* if he could have. The Shaman's cousin caught Lizzie's eye and they both *doubled up.* Even the young mother in her peaceful bed of reindeerskins *smiled* in her sleep. Fevvers' *laughter* seeped through the gaps in the window-frames and cracks in the door-frames of all the houses in the village, the villagers stirred in their beds, *chuckling* at the *enormous joke* that invaded their dreams, of which they would remember nothing in the morning except the *mirth* it caused. *She laughed, she laughed, she laughed.* It seemed this *laughter* of the happy young woman rose up form the wilderness in a spiral and began to twist and shudder across Siberia. It *tickled* the sleeping sides of the inhabitants of the railhead at R., it penetrated the counterpoint of the music of the Maestro's house, the members of the republic of free women experienced it in a refreshing breeze. The Colonel and the Escapee, snug in a smoking compartment on the way to Khabarovsk, caught the echoes and found abashed *smiles creeping* across their faces. The spiralling tornado of Fevvers' *laughter* began to twist and shudder across the entire globe, as if a spontaneous response to the *giant comedy* that endlessly unfolded beneath it, until everything that lived and breathed, everywhere was *laughing.* (294-295) (*my emphasis*)

As I have argued, the winged giantess Fevvers' freakish anatomy, discursive tactics and non-authorial authorship, all recall the Bakhtinian carnivalesque grotesque—though with a greater concern for the marginalized, 'othered' freaks taken as starting points during the

alternatively enabling re-definitions of the self and the system. Accordingly, Fevvers' laughter—vibrating her body and text alike—can be interpreted with reference to the medieval culture of folk humour, more specifically the carnivalesque merriment, described by Bakhtin as a delirious and democratizing, spectacularly festive, communal destabilization of socially set norms, systems and hierarchies, inciting the shared, light-hearted, liberating laughter of every body, via commemorating the merrier side of the grotesque. (see Bakhtin 1968) In a carnivalesque fashion, Fevvers's triumphant stage smile reveals her carnivorous teeth (18), inviting to share her unrestrained appetite for carnal pleasures in an erotic vertigo. She provokes the obscene laughter of common folk by mockingly "showing off the crack in her bum" (17) during her trapeze act. As if in an unrestrained self-parody, her *femme-fatale*-seductress-smile turns into gigantic belches, volcanic sighs, and enormous yawns. Her final spiralling tornado of laughter, sweeping away the entire narrative, provokes a giant comedy, a cosmic merriment of (deconstruable) 'non-meaning' involving all. Thus, Fevvers's feverish carnivalesque laughter destabilizes in a revolutionary play the macro- and microcosmic order, challenges ideological state apparati and internal inhibitions, troubles patriarchally prescribed, debilitatingly internalised social, representational, epistemological dogmas and dichotomies. It celebrates heterogeneous ambivalence, unfinished metamorphosis, the abolition of the intimidating, patriarchal sacrificial logic based on the reproduction and exclusion of abjectified differences. It exalts rebirth in death, annihilation in the plenitude of life, abject in sublime, the 'other' in the 'I,' fantastic performance in authentic reality, divine passion in vulgar mockery, pathos in profanizing parody, Eros in Thanatos, reason in madness (and vice versa)—endlessly celebrating enabling alterities.

The ex-static carnivalesque laughter, marked by excess, ambiguity and corporeality, provides a Dyonysian delirium of subversive possibilities, an orgiastic rejoicing over the unlimited wish-fulfilment, a contagious hysteric revelry in surplus, and a festive debauchery of desiring bodies without end—echoed in the overflowing body-text. (see Szilárd 1989) The carnivalesque dynamics fuse cosmic, social and material laughter. The thousand headed carnivalesque body of the people (of all the grotesque characters of the novel) equally shares a liberatory, anti-authoritarian, communal laughter, fuelled by the integrity of its differing, (yet enabled) heterogeneous corporeality, (dis)organized by the lower bodily stratum, that generates a universal (con)fusion with the chaotic totality of being, of a cosmic world. While displaying her Rubenesque backside to everyone, Fevvers's magic flight opens up the ideal world of unanimous laughter and communal merriment. Her carnivalesque laughter is just as democratic as it is utopian: the whole world laughs and is laughed at in a cosmic mockery, a

giant comedy's unlimited laughter twisting and shuttering across the entire globe. "The truth of laughter embraces and carries away everyone, nobody could resist" (Bakhtin 1968, 82).

Fevvers's utopian-democratic, hysterically-healing, fatally-regenerative laughter pursues a radical deconstruction celebrated by the majority of Carter's critics as a successful feminist subversion of femininity inspired by the laughing female freak body, regarded as "the abode of a limitless freedom" (41), apt to break down corporeal-, linguistic- and social barriers, and provide revolutionary alternatives via chronic alterations. Her laughter echoes the "reasonable madness of the arche-carnival saturnalia's maenads," signifying the ritual sacrifice of rational masculinity, which leads to a catharctic knowledge of the self via revelation-like insanity (see Szilárd 1989). Accordingly, Fevvers delirium displays the sincerest mask, the most telling autobiografictional metatext of/on the maenadic grotesque womanwriter.

According to Paulina Palmer, Fevvers' laughter defeats the power of earthly kings, divine order, and patriarchal censorship. (Palmer 1987, 201) Magali Cornier-Michael claims that the winged woman's laughter tops the carnivalized version of female self-construction, revealing the possibility of a new feminine subject position. (Cornier-Michael 1998, 217) Sarah Gamble highlights the creative genre- and canon shaping power of Fevvers' utopian feminist laughter that carries a liberatory potential at the level of politics, femininity and narrative alike, enabling new types of feminine fiction (Gamble 1997, 156). Nicole Ward-Jouve compares the laughing Fevvers to Puss-in-Boots, a "queen carnival" eliciting "the sheer jouissance of the verbal inventiveness," "Rabelesian in its relish" (Ward Jouve 1994, 149).

From the perspective of its carnivalesque text-generating capacity, a major intertext of Fevvers' joyous, communal laughter is Hélène Cixous' groundbreaking 1975 feminist manifesto "The Laugh of Medusa," heralding women's coming to writing through the celebration of the then newly re-invented spectacular, excessive, heterogeneous, libidinous *écritures féminines*. The utopian feminist mother-text is evoked to stress the solidarity among the self-reflexive womenwriters imagining alternative, enabling strategies of self-expression for the canonically-ideologically marginalized (–Cixous' *écriture féminine*, as a subversive tactic, is, in my reading, available regardless of gender for all wishing to write beyond the patriarchally prescribed masternarratives and representational strategies—) often by means of a politically invested laughter (like Butler's self-parodying drag performer, Cixous' Medusa is laughing, overabounding in surplus, and not lacking). Yet, the limits of the utopian project of endless subversion, uncontained carnival, non-representational narrative are highlighted by Fevvers' touch of self-irony when paraphrasing the crucial metaphors of Cixous' manifesto. Fevvers re-embodies the Cixousian the new woman (re)'writing her endless body without

end' in an innovative, insurgent corporeal-textual space resisting discursive conventions. Her mock-hyperfeminized style emerges as an excessive echo of the laughing Medusa's exclamation: "Our glances, our *smiles* are spent, *laughs* exude from all our mouths, our blood flows and we extend ourselves without ever reaching an end, we never hold back our thoughts, our signs, our writing, and we are not afraid of lacking" (Cixous 1975, 336). Fevvers' self-ironic overwriting and empathic recycling of Cixousian metaphors perhaps not only highlights postmodernist feminist readers' reluctancy to read the utopian manifesto at face value, but suggests that the 'mother-text''s metaphorical nature refuses referential reading per se by containing subversive 'transrepresentational' other texts within, and even stresses the creative potentials and carnivalesque pleasures of *écritures féminines* re-enacted by her own body-text. The Cixousian writing tactic, like carnival, like *NC* celebrates ruptures, transformations, material upheavals, destabilizing symbolic (social, representational, institutional, value systematic) Order from within, "break[ing] up the "truth" with laughter" (Cixous 1975, 344). Perhaps it is not by chance, that besides 'laughter,' 'flying' and the 'winged woman' are crucial metaphors of Cixous' manifesto: *écriture féminine* performs an internal subversion through stealing 'earth-bound,' old words and making them fly (in the French polysemic 'voler') invested with alternative meanings, as the thief- and bird-like, risk-taking woman writer becomes an "airborne swimmer" in flight in an open space in-between knowledge and invention, embodying a feverish winged trickster, who "does not cling to herself, she is dispersible, prodigious, stunning, desirous and capable of others, of the other woman that she will be, of the other woman she isn't, of him, of you" (Cixous 1975, 451)—in the very image of Carter's Fevvers. Thus, the 'aerial grotesque,' confidence trickster birdwoman mockingly embodies the literalized metaphor of flying-stealing *écriture féminine*, outwitting socially constituted, naturalized categories of order, space, matter and time, via metamorphic, *aerially* flying and *earthly* corporeal body-texts, (dis)organized by "the rhythm that laughs you" (Cixous 1975, 339). Fevvers' laughter constitutes the carnivalized voice fuelling women's writing, like a grotesque arabesque troubling patriarchal representational confines, normative narrative limits, and thresholds of the consensually meaningful wor(l)d.

Nevertheless, Carter's winged heroine is aware that the carnival must end, that laughter shall not last forever, since all subversion finally reinforces the very limits it temporarily transgresses. (In Foucault's paranoid view, the ideological technologies of power capillarily produce, panoptically discipline and flawlessly contain as a safety valve all carnivalesque chaos and radical revolution directed at their destruction. (Foucault 1980, 146-166)) Accordingly, Sarah Sceats, reading *NC,* claims—quoting Carter's *In Pantoland*[94]—that the

essence of the carnivalesque festival is its transcience, as the sanctioned release of tension reconstitutes an unchanged, affirmed order (Sceats 1997, 112). Marina Warner argues that Carter's ironic text understands the limits of masquerading merrymaking, knowing that humour is a "last-ditch stratagem, even an admission of defeat" (Warner 1994, 149). Mary Russo thinks that the carnivalesque spectacle reappears neutralized and institutionalized in the European circus (Russo 1995, 159). Carter herself argues sceptically that "the carnival has to stop, [as] the whole point about the feast of fools is that things went on as they did before, after it stopped" (Sage 1992, 188). I agree that for Carter and Fevvers the regulatory system engulfs carnivalesque anarchy, like the Father incorporates *père-version,* the Symbolic Order the Semiotic Chora, meaning meaninglessness, representation the unspeakable, subjection abjection, the realist the magical, the cliché of normative, linear *phallogocentric language* that of subversive, nomadic *écriture féminine*. However, in my view, this does not mean that transgression is impossible, but rather that it is 'always-already' included inescapably within the system and the social body whose artificial, hierarchized dichotomies mask its inherent, self-deconstructive, ambiguous heterogeneity's subversive potentials. In this sense, Fevvers' laughter is more celebratory than pessimistic, yet it is far from being transparently utopian.

Paradoxically, the aerialiste's colossal comedy recalls the shy little giggle or enchanted, humble smile of the earth-bound, un-winged spectator recognizing its own limits when faced with the sublime flight provoking with an awe-struck admiration of the mighty, incomparable, unknowable, all-embracing, infinite totality (evoking the Kantian sublime (Kant 1973)). Yet, the confidence-trickster Fevvers merely performs a (pretended) authentic miracle pretending to be a hoax to gain credit in the world. As the sublime suffers a spectacular self-freaking, the enchanted smile is troubled by a (self)mocking laughter. The giantess trapezist's slow somersaults defying the laws of projectiles demand for the contemplation of unimaginable and an enchanted ravishment, but the sublime flight is disclosed as a theatricalized illusion containing its own self-defacing parody, as the monstrous-marvellous, flying 'Helen of the High Wire' simultaneously enacts the stumbling freak or the ridiculously pottering Trafalgar Square pigeon (17). The magical Fevvers is partly realist: there is always a touch of (self-)irony in the winged woman's hilarity, knowing that her colossal, revolutionary laughter can only be echoed within the symbolic as the laughter of a Beautiful Blonde Clown.

Fevvers's "blonde-as-clown-smile," an "artificial stage smile" (15) is a vital constituent of her (mock)genuine bird-womanly persona, an instrument of her "gigantic coquetry" (10) and teasing storytelling tactics, but most significantly, it is a mask travestying mythified femininity via this nonverbal sign of the mocking confidence-trickster narrator. Therefore,

Fevvers's laughter, her "last, inscrutable grimace [exchanged] with her warped reflection in the mirror" (88) also echoes 'with a difference' the laughter of the Beautiful Blonde Clown described in Carter's *The Sadeian Woman.*[95] In Carter's pro-pornography polemical work, the "blonde as clown"—enacted in Hollywood film-classics by Jean Harlow, Judy Holliday, and Jayne Mansfield[96]—is portrayed as a beautiful and sexually free woman willing to escape sexual objectification, the 'rape of the male gaze,' and naturalized negative consequences of her femininity, by becoming a "comedienne" laughing at herself. Paradoxically the sexy blonde embodies a "sexless clown" "dressed as Pierrot, the moonstruck clown of Commedia del Arte," or "in the cap and the bells of the court fool," "mak(ing) fun of herself because she can never admit she knows why she is pretty." (69) In Carter's argumentation, although the blonde clown's cross-dressing denaturalizes gender(ed beauty) norms, she remains trapped within the feminine stereotype of the Sadeian Justine, by remaining the object of laughter, the joke is always on her. Allowing "her tits and bum to turn into cues for raucious laughter, like a clown's red nose and baggy pants," she reduces her body to a sign controlled by laughter.

Nevertheless, the Beautiful Blonde Clown "remov(ing) her boobs and buttock from the armory of the seductress" as if they were "surprising and unusual physical appurtenances...as fins or *wings*," "signs of inherent *freakishness*" (68) (*my emphasis*) is revived empoweringly by the winged freak Fevvers who 'internally subverts' her conventional gender markers by ironically re-enacting patriarchal topoi of Woman as castrated, lesser, 'other' of Man, and Woman as excess who posessess two wings and arms instead of a tail.[97] As Carter confesses, Fevvers' character was inspired by Guillaume Apollinaire's depiction of de Sade's Juliette as "the new woman who will have wings and will renew the world." The socialist, feminist Carter takes Apollinaire's visionary words with a pinch of salt, knowing that "it's not going to be as easy as that" (Carter in Katsavos 1994, 13)—a doubtful line repeated by *NC*'s fairly sceptic and pragmatic feminist Lizzie.[98] Carter's laughing winged freak demythologizes the mandatory binary recipe of femininity (surfacing in the Sadeian masochist, angelic Justine and the exhibitionist, domina Juliette) by (re)constructing a pleasurable 'feminist feminine' subject position. Instead of the Clownish Blonde Beauty laughing at herself with the satisfied male spectators, Fevvers laughs at the patriarchally reproduced femininity-myths. The essence of her confidence trick is that she escapes gender stereotypes while remaining, or rather being constantly re/un/re-made as a metamorphic, spectacularly self-stylizing, mockingly hyper-feminine *a(-)woman*ly being. In Fevvers' corporeagraphic metafiction, hers is a (self-)ironic, knowing laughter *on* the Beautiful Blonde Clown by a dyed blonde with brown at the roots.

As Carter states, "Fevvers is basically Mae West with wings," characterised by an extraordinary (self-)control over of her mock-performance and the audience-response provoked (Haffenden 1985, 88). Fevvers indeed resembles Mae West,[99] Carter's favourite figure from 20th century iconography, praised by Carter for being a clownesque "pantomime dame" posessing almost "the anarchic freedom of a female impersonator"—like Butler's gender performer in drag—who enjoys her sexual and financial freedom, has a sardonic disregard for convention, and makes of her predatoriness a joke that conceals and exploits its own power (Carter 1978, 60). As Lorna Sage suggests, the camp and comic Mae West—identified by Carter with Perrault's independent, worldly-wise and self-confident fairy godmothers—is "her own woman (her own script-writer), large, bawdy, armed with wit against power to make women beautifully pathetic" (Sage 1994a, 40). Thus, Mae West, the blonde clown, the winged giantess and the fairy godmother fuse in the feminist authorial persona Carter invents in *NC* as the trope of the woman writer able to speak up, to make herself heard in joyous, empowering voices of her own.

ii. The Clown's Simulated Smiles and Laughter of Dissolution

Paradoxically, Fevvers' joyous, carnivalesque merriment is both reinforced and undermined by the fearful laughter of the mad circus clown Buffo, who strangely proves to embody her uncanny double. Buffo is the Great Clown of Clowns, a quintessence of all that clowns personify: he is lonely, lovesick Pierrot, cunning, clumsy Harlequin, deformed Triboulet, vulgar Buffon,[100] as well as a sacred madman, "a mad priest," the very (mock)image of (a sacrilegeous) Christ suffering (amidst laughter) for the sins (and amusement) of mankind. As Tamás Bényei also notes, Fevvers and Buffo, and their excessive and ambiguous corporeal-performances presented at nights at the circus share freakish, grotesque qualities. (Bényei 1997, 306) Both of them are simultaneously divine and abject, other-wordly yet of lowly Cockney origin, Fevvers' enormous appetite matches Buffo's insatiable thirst, the aerialiste defies gravity as the clown defies reason, she demythologizes femininity as he does christianity. They both grimace at their warped reflections in the "inverted world of the mirror," cracking the glass of the socializing-normalizing Lacanian mirror stage (see 51, 88, 173, 177) by performing multiple, ever-changing, illusory identities in spectacles provoking enchanted or frightened laughter. During their doubled confidence trick Buffo's madness appears on stage as an "illusion of intentional Bedlam" (177), while Fevvers performs the authentic miracle pretending to be a hoax. Already before her circus career Fevvers' adolescent body foreshadows her spectacular future: in her first revisionary performance she poses in Ma Nelson's brothel's *tableau vivant* as 'Victory with wings'

equipped with a phallic sword, while her naked body is "*spread* with the wet white that *clowns* use in the circus" (37) (*my emphasis*). As the promise of her spreading wings is linked to the clowns' future act, and as her location in the brothel evokes the clowns as "*whores* of mirth perpetually at play" (119), her body becomes a prophetic 'melting-pot' predicting two modes of grotesque subversion: the simulating, sublime flight and the *dance macabre* to come: the liberatory, playfully-pleasurably destabilizing carnivalesque performance and the vertiginiously annihilating, cruelly self-dismantling mad-performance brought to extreme. Fevvers and Buffo are intimately linked, since "under these impenetrable disguises of wet white [of the clowns], you might find, were you to look, the features of those who were once proud to be visible. You find there, per example, the *aerialiste* whose nerve has failed" (119). As Buffo started his circus career as an acrobat, the winged trapezist inherently risks becoming a fallen angel, a sad circus clown bound to the earth of the arena miming a happiness he does not own.

Despite their similiarities, Fevvers and Buffo never appear together, never meet face to face throughout the novel. The reason may be that they embody *opposing facets* of a single plural Janus face, two different sides of the same ambiguous coin. Their schizophrenic pair embodies the troubling heterogeneity of the grotesque freak body, semioticized in a text vibrated by laughters provoked by the (feminist reinterpretation of the) Bakhtinian, Medieval or the Kayserian, Romantic versions of subversive grotesquerie and grotesque subversion.

On the one hand, Fevvers—winged woman, mad maenad, smiling Medusa and blonde clown in one—performs a self-freaking grotesque body to elicit, in a medieval, Bakhtinian fashion, a triumphant, joyous, carnivalesque laughter associated with playful revolt, communal celebration and even the frenzy of a utopian optimism, (Bakhtin 1968) complemented by a thorough feminist criticism and self-irony. On the other hand, the mad clown Buffo and his miserable gang provoke a confusing, repressive and corrective, or desperately compensatory laughter of a terrifying quality—recalling the darker, ominous, abysmal Romantic grotesque that, in Wolfgang Kayser's view, reveals human being as a puppet in a hostile, monstrously horrible *theatrum mundi*, where the alienated subject, aware of his sinister existential uncertainty, can only respond to the disintegrating world(dis)order's chaotic turbulence with an infernal laughter. (Kayser 1963)

Buffo, the Great, "terrible, hilarious, appaling, devastating" Clown of Clowns (116), primarily governed by aggressive instincts and destructive death drives, "adores the old jokes, the collapsing chairs, the exploding puddings" (119), he likes to burn clown policemen alive, nearly stabs to death Walser the Human Chicken, and goes insane on the stage in such an

authentic performance that he is finally irreversibly enclosed within the 'straightjacket of his mimed madness.' In his 'theatre of cruelty,' he stages the victimizer victim of material objects, of communal fury, of a hostile world, and particularly of his own frenzy. Buffo is a chimeric emblem of perversion, corruption, and chaos. He conducts the violent bergomask, the savage jig of the clowns, an orgiastic *dance macabre*, "danc[ing] the whirling apart of everything, the end of love, the end of hope[...]the exhaustion of the implacable present" (243). Their dance of disintegration and regression celebrates the primal slime, invokes the end of the world, and stages the falling apart of the human body in a chaotic whirlpool of grotesque, distorted movements, with dwarfs somersaulting backwards in a storm of silent weeping, harlequins spinning around screaming in a succession of cartwheels, clowns rhythmically pelting one another with leftover crusts of black bread and emptied vodka bottles, a joey merrily slicing off the bright purple, yellow starred, re-appearing fake virile member(s) of an august, and Buffo lurching shrieking with uncoordinated gesticulations of arms and legs. In Buffo's dreadfully fascinating metamorphosis, his smiling mask becomes the face that eclipses 'me' to reveal the 'other' and nobody at all, a vacancy in excess, both disembodied and overcharged with lowly corporeality. (In his dialectics of uselessness, "nothing plus nothing equals something once you know the nature of plus" (123).) In the mournful spectacle of the Clown's Funeral, Buffo performs the complete dissolution of self, meaning and reality by "shake! shake! shake(ing) out his teeth, shak(ing) off his nose, shak(ing) away his eyeballs, let all go flying off in a convulsive self-dismemberment" (117), to be carried away in a coffin by death-masked clowns as the self-deconstructing subject who reconstructs himself raging to be annihilated again and again inescapably, hopelessly, in vain. He crucifies himself but refuses to resurrect. He reasons with his lowly corporeality's illogic. He laughs but makes you cry. He is the "center that does not hold," the Lord of Misrule in a Feast of Fools (175), the grotesque Old Man, Master, Christ, Father of clowns who cruelly erases himself out of the center, so as to destabilize the entire system, to make the sawdust ring vibrate and all collapse. Buffo enacts the most threatening, repressed constituent of (re)productive, rational human life that is all-embracing death along with nonproductive expenditure, chaotic drives, irresistible loss, abject waste and mad meaninglessness. Buffo's final performance illustrates how significantly clowning's simulated smiles, raging laughters and hideous grimaces differ from the conventional concept of the comic:

> The elastic moment stretched, and stretched further, and stretched too far to sustain its comic tension. The laughter died away. A querulous ripple ran through the crowd.[...

>]Walser [...]saw the great clown's reason snap.[...]And now Buffo, in his delirium began to shake, to shake and shiver most horribly, to most horribly grimace and to convulse himself in such a way that his immense form seemed to be everywhere at once, dissolving into a dozen Buffos, armed with a dozen murderous knives all streaming rags of blood, and leap and tumble as he might, Walser could find no place in the ring where Buffo was not and gave up hope for himself (176-178)

The clown, this "demonic, malign, enchanted reveller" fails to provoke a wholehearted laughter. He makes babies weep with terror, children teeter between tears and laughter, gape near panic and hysteria. Adult's "laughter at clowns comes from successful suppression of fear" (151), as a bitter compensation fuelled by repressed anxiety, terror and loathing.

The clown's performance certainly seems more fearful than funny. Buffo is a *Doppelgänger* figure, an 'evil-twin,' a darker double of Fevvers. He is automaton-like with distorted movements, madly rages in epileptic fits, devastates himself decaying, buried alive in his (mimed) madness. Thus, he enacts the Freudian uncanny, the frightening yet fascinating invasion of the familiar by the *unheimlich* (un)familiar that "ought to have remained secret and hidden but comes to light" in a disturbing *déjà vu*, provoking a sense of helplessness by recalling an early mental stage, along with psychosis and death, where the (non)ego not yet or no more marks itself off sharply from the external world and the other. (see Freud 1953)

Buffo's "center that does not hold" is also the Kristevian *abject*'s elsewhere "beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable," threatening with the breakdown of meaning caused by the loss of distinction between self and other, as the destabilized subject is placed beside himself, *abjectified* by the return of the catastrophic, heterogeneous repressed otherness, re-emerging via impure corporeal functions, body waste and more dramatically the corpse, all which must be normally thrust aside in order to live. (Kristeva 1982, 1-31) The clowns "stained with dung, mire and vomit" (173) are associated with the "primal slime" of the abject's corporeal degradation, and overwhelming material waste, while their abjectified Master wears, in a disgusting, grotesque reverse logic, his most intimate and obscene insides on his outside in the form of a wig simulating a bladder to suggest that "he stores his brain in the organ, which, conventionally stores piss" (116). Buffo the clown, who pretends to make you laugh, yet whose derision of laughter drowns into tears of terror and shame, literally embodies Kristeva's metaphors for *abjection* by enacting the fearsome friend who stabs you in the back, the shameless rapist, or the killer who claims to be the savior (Kristeva 1982, 4). Unexpected like a terrorist, he introduces the "willed and terrible suspension of being" into the heart of wholehearted laughter by threatening with the "abjectification of the subject" (Kiss 1996, 21), the dissemination of meaning, and the disintegration of reality.

Faced with the fascinating and repulsive, tempting and condemned, sacred and profane taboo, embodied by the circus clown, the audience experiences *abjection*, this crushing "weight of meaninglessness about which there is nothing insignificant," and reacts in a "twisted braid of affects and thought" (Kristeva 1982, 2) with a nauseous laughter, that is a compensatory, self-protective gesture willing to expel the heterogeneous 'other' from within myself to constitute the imaginarily self-sufficient, 'safe' symbolic self. In my view, the circus-audience's convulsions of nervous laughter fulfil the very same protective function as the convulsions of nausea, the spasms of wretching and vomiting, described by Kristeva as primary safeguards protecting us from the defiling abject that is 'not me', yet engulfs me at the border of my condition as a living being. While the abjectified clown enacts the "hatred that smiles" (Kristeva 1982, 4), a delight in loss, a resurrection gone through the death of the ego, the circus audience fully realizes (Kristeva's hints at) the potential of "laughing [a]s a way of placing or displacing abjection" (Kristeva 1982, 8). The clown's spectators become abjection's "fascinated victims,"whose sorrowful, bitter, neurotic laughter—reminding of a terrible, involuntary, tick-like smile at a funeral—constitutes a desperate attempt at fighting all-engulfing abjection and neutralizing the powers of horror. Despite the primal chaos' carrying the potential of primary jouissance, Buffo's performance is less satisfactory than disturbing for the spectators, as the experience of abject exists only within the symbolic realm of repression, loss and compensation.

The obscene, blasphemous, sado-masochistically aggressive performance of clowns resembles the *tendency wit*, the most widespread type of jokes, dwelling in vulgar, morbid, sacrilegeous humour to fight the threatening otherness via verbally attacking 'sscapegoated' marginalized groups, just as much as symbolic order, values and taboos. The aggressive *tendency wit* is interpreted by Freud as a phobic protective mechanism surfacing in violent verbal form of comic insults, re-compensating for traumas and repressed anxieties by a momentary elimination of inhibitions and fear, providing pleasure via an ephemeral release or saving of the psychic energy necessary for repression. (see Freud 1982) However, as jokes' 'weapons' are symbolic words inseparable from the discursive technologies of power (operating via ideological interpellations and prohibitions), the discursively (re)constituted social subject is inherently invested with repression. Jokes signify impossible attempts at revolt, with illusory recompensation, and real re-experiencing of loss, reinforcement of limits. The *abject* as semiotic *déjà vu* may reappear within the symbolic language of the speaking social subject only to be 'always already' repressed.

Therefore, the clowns act as agents of socialization and repression. Enclosed within the (dis)order of the circus ring, they "teach little children the truth about the filthy ways of the filthy world" (119), disclosing that all joking clowns are "licensed to commit licence, yet are forbidden to act," even if they detonate the entire city around nothing would really change (174), as their chaos is compensatory, simulated, manipulated, and corrective. The laughter the clowns invite to share is a socially conditioned laughter taught to all, based on a common knowledge of the symbolic. It is a cruelly corrected and corrective, 'impure' laughter serving to discipline, to normalize both the marginalized ridiculized and the contained mockers.

The round, O-like ring of the circus arena recalls Jeremy Bentham's 19th century prison, the *Panopticon*[101] described by Foucault as the ideal structure of surveillance that maximises the visibility of the inmates by allowing the jailer at the centre to see all of them, while they can neither see each other nor the jailer, and therefore, not knowing when they are observed, will behave all the times as if they were under the controlling gaze. According to the Foucauldian argumentation, in our panoptical societies, very similarly, the subjects internalize the disciplining gaze of the Eye of the Power in social spaces structured (by ideological state apparati) as spaces of exclusion and containment, where visibility and spectacularization signify primal means of surveillance, so that laughter may only fulfil a corrective function (Foucault 1980, 146-166). Tendency wit on spectacularly marginalized groups, on policemen, blonde women, mother-in-laws, Jews, Gypsies, gays, freaks or clowns—instead of allowing for the celebratory, communal sharing of carnivalesque merriment *with* everyone laughing *with* the others—functions as an ideologically invested 'sacrificial' othering, a marginalizing, normalizing corrective-mechanism, summoning to laugh *at* others. Its aim is to reinforce hegemonic order by a reassuring, controlling laughter at the humiliated 'scapegoat' rendered visible to everyone in order to be punished for his abnormal(ized), deviant other(ed)ness.

As a predecessor to Freud, Bergson in his 1900 treaty *Le rire. Essai sur la signification du comique* (see Bergson 1924, 1994) reveals at the heart of the comic this disciplinary social function of laughter scolding all attempts at revolt, or in Carter's words, "outcast[ing] and disregard[ing], despis[ing] and reject[ing], the scapegoat [the clown] upon whose stooped shoulders is heaped the fury of the mob" (122), the social subject's sado-masochistic "mirth created by clowns [that] grows in proportion to the humiliation he is forced to endure" (122).

The clown never succeeds in eliciting a cheerful, innocent merriment and he himself fails to smile sincerely. His laughter is a cry embodying the deepest sorrow, despair and the filth of life. His face is contorted by the most hideous grimaces, the "cheerless arabesques of the damned" (243). His staged decomposition provokes the destabilized audience's corrupted,

compensatory, neurotic laughter. The bitter laughter on/of the miserable clown recalls the embarrassed "grimace-smile" of the alienated being (Kayser 1963, 154), drowning in the grotesque meaninglessness of an abysmal world. According to Buffo, you take to clowning when all else fails, as despair is the constant companion of the clowns, these alienated freaks doomed to "laughing, laughing, laughing to hide their broken hearts" (178).

As Tamás Bényei argues, the Carterian clowns' laughter recalls the *absolute comic* described by Baudelaire in his *De l'essence de rire* as the paradoxical pleasure of the fallen mankind whose recognition of its limits, inferiority and incompetence to attain the absolute sublime truth is accompanied by a knowing laughter that recognises its subordination to the immaculate happiness of paradisiac ignorance, yet also assures a simultaneous superiority over the brute material world via the wisdom of laughter, a laughing knowledge. (Bényei 1997, 307-332) Similarly, Georges Bataille also stresses the sovereign sapience of laughter, particularly in his erotic, mortal, mystical *inner experience* whereby the wounded, fractured subject, open to deathly pain and joy without reserve denounces of meaning and self, and sacrifices himself in a transgressive, unlimited self-risking play, to enter the impossible realm of nonproductive expenditure, pure loss and Non-Knowledge with a nocturnal, sovereign, knowing laughter. (see Bataille 1998) The clowns master the knowledge of Non-Knowledge. Ordered by chaos, they mean by meaninglessness. Knowing that nothing can be known, they know everything. Objects and subjects of laughter by choice, the clowns "dance for the wretched of the earth, that they might witness their own wretchedness" (119). Thus, as Bényei underlines, they are the grotesque twin-brothers of the postmodern split subject recognizing its mis(self)recognition in the cruel circus of society with an ironic, self-reflexive meta-laughter on the very knowledge of laughter. The clowns enact the painfully disillusioning, corrective or ironically knowing laughter of the postmodern split subject (Bényei 1997, 308), confused by unnamable anxieties of primary loss, uncompensatable lack, desiring mourning forever in vain. In Bényei's original reading, the clowns' laughter constitutes *NC*'s kernel of meaning and textual blindspot. This loudest laughter never really laughs and bursts out of the story of the joyous winged aerialiste, as the clowns are swept away by a whirlpool, out of the circus camp, to become the "centre that does not hold" and can (dis)order the text by simulated smiles and chaotic laughters of dissolution.

Although the differing laughters provoked by Fevvers' and Buffo's two facets of freakish grotesquerie certainly constitute major narrative engines of *NC*'s polyphonic, clownish and feverish, laughing text outlining a carnivalesque grotesque circus performance, finally I wish to unveil another type of laughter as the ultimate engine of the laughing text.

iii. Childrens' Hilarious Laughing Fits

Despite the academically acknowledged Barthesian idea of the *death of the author* (Barthes 1977) and the primarily reader-response theoretical stance of my study, I wish to remark some parallels in Carter's biography and texts, thought-provoking coincidences between conceptions and births, which in my view, might have unconsciously influenced the Carterian narrative. Carter's son, Alexander Pearce is born in 1983, while *NC* is published in 1984, presumably written during the pregnancy and the infancy of the newborn.[102] I argue that the text seems to be surrounded by a child's body, being present even by its absence, invading space, and transforming wor(l)ds. In 1985 John Haffenden interviewing Carter on *NC* launches his report by commenting on this 'infantile invasion,' describing "her baby Alexander consum[ing] the room and threaten[ing] the interview with healthy hubbub" (Haffenden 1985, 77), while in an 1988 interview with Anna Katsavos, still in relation to the excessive narrative of the aerialiste, Carter confesses: "I find myself thinking much more simply because I'm spending so much time with a small child. [...but] I can only say life is too short for haiku for me. It's too complicated a form, and at the moment (children are discursive) I find myself discursive" (Katsavos 1994, 15). These biographical fragments convinced me to seek further for a more profound textual engine of merriment beyond the winged woman's and clowns' laughter. As a reader who is also mother of a one-and-a-half-years-old child and pregnant with the second infant at the time of writing my study on *NC* (2004), I realized the possibility of an interpretation[103] that could argue that at the heart or rather in the belly of the narrative vibrated by laughing freakish bodies, beyond the winged woman's and clowns' laughter, the *infantile laughter of children's merriment* can be discovered. Thus, unlike feminist critics applauding Fevvers' or Bényei innovatively reevaluating the clowns' laughter, I disclose how *NC*'s polyphonic mirth is enriched by a most subversive infantile hilarity, how the healthy hubbub, the loquacious babble, the playful nonsense of small children infiltrates the novel surfacing in its narrative gaps, to foreshadow Carter's last and perhaps most humorous novel, tellingly entitled, ***Wise Children***.

NC does not have any child protagonists. However, in my view, the few children who nevertheless appear in the text play a vital role in the narrative-organization and plot-structuring. Destabilizing the metaphysics of presence, these Carterian children mark the textual space in its functioning by being omnipresent even via their absences, and becoming the engine of the laughing narrative through the very gaps of the narrative. They appear merely briefly, irrelevantly in the story to disappear for good, yet, as a closer reading reveals, they leave behind subversively significant traces in the text.

The four-years-old Violetta is Fevvers's adored foster niece, who, embodied by a tiny bunch of lucky Parma violets on the aerialiste's bosom, metaphorically accompanies her from London everywhere on her picaresque journeys, to inspire her actions and narration. The only thing we learn of the little girl from the heroine's oral reminiscences is that Fevvers never forgets how with "Violetta on [her] knee, [they] explore[d] together the adventures of A and B and C" (54). Thus, Violetta shares Fevvers's letters, underlies her silences[104] (52, 54) and becomes, via the symbolic violets omnipresent in her impersonal star's dressing room, the only thing "to give her [her 'real' self or 'true' wor(l)ds] away" (14). ("She reached out to caress the bunch of Parma violets on her dressing-table with a smile that, for once, was not meant for Walser to see." (54)) Tellingly, the winged woman's final triumphant outburst of laughter is preceded by the discovery of new-grown snow violets, purple ink on a white sheet, embodying a beloved child, and the promise of a new text, a continuation of woman's writing. Little Violetta is there in the optimistic feminist (un)ending, when a "miracle of frail violets[...]big with perfume and optimism[...]in full bloom" (284) burst the snow, this "blank sheet of fresh paper on which they could inscribe whatever future they wished" (218).

Little Ivan, grandson of the deeply implied authoress baboushka, fatherless son of the escaped female outlaw, murderess Olga, opens the second part in St Petersburg by embodying the implied reader. Born into a matriarchal story, the other writing of the strange, cyrillic alphabet of Mother Russia, he "perch[es], round-eyed, on a three-legged stool beside [babouska] in the kitchen" (95), amusedly listening to a repeatedly re-started, forever unfinished fragment of a tale that underlies the narrative to come. "There was a pig went to Petersburg" (95, 96, 97) is instantly rephrased in Walser's report (97) and is literally materialized by *NC*'s memorable character, Sybil, Colonel Kearney's fortune-teller pig (98). The *Fort und Da* play of the repeatedly re-launched and rejected tale-fragment models the functioning of the text, staging the 'good vibration,' the endless laughter and the nonsensical sense of the infantile merriment in childplay. Innocent Little Ivan, gaping near hysteric panic and entranced ravishment (while ironically, the sleeping baboushka merely groans) (125) joins the clowns' act, but when he wants to flee away with Buffo's mad troupe, Walser gently throws him off the train and out of the story. The clowns cannot teach him "the truth about the filthy ways of a filthy world" (122) or their cruel "laughter coming from the successful suppression of fear" (151). Little Ivan's laughter may stay pure since, as Fevvers and Walser seem to agree, contemplating "Little Ivan rolled in the snow, pelted with [her] diamonds," "through our children we might be saved, perhaps" (193). The image of the child in the white snow symbolizes again (our need for) a touch of hope (and even self-conscious, occasionally

self-ironic idealism), as *NC* invites readers to consider Freud's conclusion at the end of his essay on wit, suggesting that children are not yet in need of tendency wit's harsh, clownish jokes in order to be fully happy, while it encourages, through identification with the hidden implied reader Little Ivan, to revive the pleasures of infantile merriment.[105]

Tellingly, both Violetta and Little Ivan, and all the children 'thrown' or 'swept out' of the narrative[106] seem to return at the very end of *NC*. On New Year's Eve, the day of (re)birth, Fevvers and Lizzie, wandering in no man's land save a child along with its mother, rescuing them from the barbarious tribal custom dooming women in labor and their newborns to pariahs' seclusion likely resulting in inhuman death. As the final happy end peaks in the spiralling tornado of Fevvers' victorious laughter, the saved baby, this ungendered, nomadic child, is the very first to join in, to share merriment with an infantile humour that does not seek to mock, parody, gloat or even understand or interpret, but simply submerges in a pure *joie de vivre* that finally resonates in its laughing fit the chuckle of all children dropped out yet popping up, recurring underlying in the whole text: "She laughed so loud that the baby in the Shaman's cousin's house heard her, waved its little fists in the air and laughed delightedly too[...]until everything that lived and breathed, everywhere, was laughing." (294-5)

A close reading may reveal how the entire structure of the text resonates an infantile frenzy of laughter as the plot takes the form of childplay. In his 1900 book on laughter, Bergson convincingly reveals the pleasure and nonsense logic of childhood plays as the *jack-in-the-box*, the *puppet on strings* and the *rolling snowball* in the workings of the comic, and comedies' action, performance and reception. (Bergson 1994) Following this argumentation, I examine how the Bergsonian toys, along with other childish plays as the *pick-a-boo*, the *tickling game*, the *chasing game* or the *nonsense symbolic play* are embedded in the very dynamics of the Carterian narrative, thus turning the infantile laughing fit, sprung from children's grotesque body the crucial engine of the laughing text.

Bergson's *rolling snowball* slowly becoming an avalanche marks an insignificant initial cause eliciting more and more significant effects, until it finally results in an unexpectedly serious outcome.[107] Carter's magical realist picaresque narrative overabounds with grotesque chains of events, rolling like growing snowballs on the loose throughout the text's minor embedded stories and overall structure. Ma Nelson slips on a dog turd in a dirty London street, is mangled to pulp by a drewer's dray, her grotesque death signifies the end of the brothel-house of sufragettes, the girls burn down the place, the first chapter of Fevvers' life goes up in flames, and initiates her adventurous journey. Ice-cream vendor Gianni, member of Fevvers' foster family has a worsening cough, eager to gain money for his medical treatment,

Fevvers ends up in Madame Schreck's Museum of Woman Monsters. One of the ex-whores marries a human eel, a chance meeting with them launches the unemployed Fevvers' career as circus star aerialiste. The dizzying succession of picaresque adventures culminates in the avalanche of Fevvers' final laughter sweeping away overwhelmingly every event, action and decision of the text as mere chance, illusion, or confidence-trick.

The Bergsonian comic *jack-in-the-box*—this toy box with a frightening, funny or odd (usually clown) figure inside suddenly springing out when the lid is opened—is the underlying model for Fevvers' repeated flight and fall, her constant entrapment, escape from and tumble back into spectacular yet limiting stereotypes of femininity (from Cupid, to Victory with Wings, to Angel of Death, to Cockney Venus, Helen of the High Wire, Madonna of the Arena, and Winged Wonder) enclosing her, until she breaks free again, only to drop back to other(ed) stagings. The 'jack-in-the-box narrative' jumps back and forth, as Fevvers' and others' (Walser, Lizzie, baboushka, omniscient narrator) narratorial voices interrupt and re-,restart the polyphonic narrative, as authentic veracity and utterly unreliable fantasy-flow[108] exchange each other, as grotesquerie oscillates between terror and hilarity, celebration and compensation, while Fevvers switches between marvel and monstress. The aim is to amuse by playing, circus-like, with narrative tension and release, toying with horizons of expectations.

Bergson's comic *puppet-on-strings*—whose uncoordinated convulsions evoke the Carterian freaks' strange gestures—is enacted by the (implied) reader who keeps falling for all of Fevvers' tricks, duped by the confidence-trickster narrative. The implied author(s), moving the strings weaving the text, or vibrating the narrative do not recall the patriarchal tyrant puppet-master (embodied by Uncle Philip of *The Magic Toyshop* or Dr Hoffman of *The Infernal Deskre Machines of Doctor Hoffman*), but rather resemble Little Ivan teaching the cat to dance (98), a child fully involved in its play. In the childplay's ludic world and fantastic il-logic, the positions of puppet and puppeteer are not only mutually dependent but also democratically interchangeable. Little Ivan and his feline companion—like implied authors and interpellated readers do—co-operate, dancing together, taking turns in pulling each other's legs and the strings of the narrative.

A potential latent textual engine fuelling *NC*'s self-freaking, laughing narrative is the insignificantly verbalized yet symbolically significant small child's clumsily disproportionate, mischievously uncontrolled, nonrepressed, infantile body—intimate with abject corporeality, growing in constant metamorphosis, vibrated by intense motor movements, sudden changes of mood or incongruous thoughts, and driven by play to burst with frenetic laughing fits. Due to corporeal motor movements' playing a vital role in children's plays and infantile humour,

Bergson's childish *toys* modeling (the source of) comic laughter could be substituted by childish *plays*, lacking all props, and based on mere corporeal presence or absence(—as in the most primitive stage of humour, regarded by laugher theoreticians, as qualitatively distinct from later stages mostly restricted to the communally governed appreciation of socially transmitted jokes (Shultz 1996, 27-33)). Thus, the *chasing 'game'* stands in for the *rolling snowball*, the *peek-a-boo* matches the *jack-in-the-box*, while the *tickling 'game'*[109] substitutes the convulsive *puppet-on-strings*. As I demonstrated in relation to Bergson's model, *NC*'s self-freaking body-text acts out the functioning of these infantile childplays characterised by corporeality and emotionality, excess, repetition, unresolved ambiguity and incongruity (in the lack of rules and the permeability between the positions of peeker and peeked, chaser and chased, tickler and tickled), as well as the mixture of tension and resolution, (of the desire to become and to avoid being (un)seen/chased/tickled). All these characteristics of childplay are vocalized in an unlimited laughing fit semioticized in the Carterian over-writing style. Carter's unrestrained—(mock) hysteric, kitschy or mannerist—over-accumulation of poetic figures and tropes, her avalanche of synonyms in maniac nuancings filled with litotes, her obsession with an imbroglio of strange oxymorons, unexpected turns, or surrealist catachresis in an excessive, ambiguous body-text narrating the adventures of a spreading troupe of grotesque freaks erupting in strange laughters constitutes an overwhelming novel moved at its core by uncontrollable childish laughter and play, bursting the narrative at its stitches.

As the reader—invited to read *NC* out loud to fully enjoy its embodied voices' lively, somatized oral quality—goes on with the extremely lengthy, linguistically complicated, poetically overcharged sentences of Carter's sophisticated yet self-ironic, baroquish periodic style, the reader's breaths taken between the too long clauses within one single sentence enact the respiration within laughter. Laughter theoretician, Hugh Chapman defines smile and laughter as specified by an upward stretching of the mouth, a build up of isometric muscle tension, occuring with or without inarticulate vocal sounds of a reiterated 'ha-ha variety,' and usually "*accompanied by loud exhalations of breath, particularly at the inception*" (Chapman 1996, 158, *my emphasis*). *NC*'s readers' loud exhalations of breath echo Fevvers', clowns' and children's frenetic laughters via the embodied inner voice of rhythmic, deep breathing. In the logic of Eastern philosophy, this merriment accompanied by a meditative breathing of/in the Carterian over-writing may become a mode of spiritual healing and the source of wisdom, revealing the grotesque sublime of the grain in the avalanche, of the breath in the thunder. The reader ready to breathe to the rhythm of the text revives the transverbal 'other text' troubling symbolic representation's, patriarchal masternarratives' conventional narrativity. Subversion

is set to work, the text starts to resonate, as the spontaneous surplus of the breaths coded in the narrative is enacted by self-freaking characters and readers ready to stage the physical pneumonic contractions, the intensive respiration of a hilarious laughter beyond all words.

Strangely, *NC*'s excessively loquacious, overwritten narrative reaches the same humorous effect as silent films, speechless burlesque movies do. In a mockery of representation, speaking too much seems to equal saying no words at all. *NC* fulfills all the criteria of Charlie Chaplin's *burlesque*. It(s magical realism) treats an absurd situation with complete reality. It(s circus theme) builds on a farce on life that the audience laughs at in order not to die from it. Its cliché-ridden, spontaneously related incidents, the fast, visually comic slapsticks and the serial running gags (recalling the *snowball* and the *jack-in-the-box*) make up the (mock)silly stories. It relies on the universality of comic body-language and the poeticity of pantomime (performed by the freak as *puppet-on-strings*). (Meryman 1966) Most convincingly, the novel meets Sergei Eisenstein's definition of the Chaplinian burlesque:

> to see things most terrible, most pitiful, most tragic through the eyes of a laughing child...to see the images of these things spontaneously and suddenly--outside their moral-ethical significance, outside valuation and outside judgment and condemnation--to see them as a child sees them through a burst of laughter (Eisenstein 1946, 33-34).

In my view, besides the feminist, socialist, ideology-critical implications of *NC*, it is crucial to reveal the "careless merriment" of ("Chaplin,) the Kid" (Eisenstein 1, 11) at the heart of the text (surfacing in its structure and style), to disclose the Chaplinian burlesque[110] as a promising, unjustly neglected intertext[111] of *NC* moved by children's careless merriment.

The Chaplinian burlesque and the Bergsonian comic play fuse in the *NC*'s children's laughter as a 'transrepresentational' deep narrative engine. Unlike Colonel Kearney's "ludic game" concentrating on the capitalist profit- and production-oriented financial, economical aspects of the *grand jeu* of circus, or unlike the Grand Duke's cruelly sophisticated, uncanny automaton-toys aiming at imprisoning everything in frozen symbolic meanings for his private perverted pleasures (willing to trap the miniaturized winged woman in a gilded cage), children's plays seem 'innocently subversive,' since they remain unrepressed and non-productive, lacking objectives, regulations or self-reflexivity, uncharged with compensatory social meanings of symbolization. Childplay provides the freedom of hilarity to the *homo ludens* standing in for the *homo sapiens*, exchanging rule-bound games based on the

consensus of reason for unlimited, irrational, infantile play, substituting cruel, compensatory tendentious wit by the 'pure humour' of a *joie de vivre*.

The laughter of the text destabilizes the Freudian normative, evolutionary model of the psychogenesis of humour, by reversing the logical process of cognitive development that contributes to a mature sense of humour (see Freud 1982, Shultz 1996, 17). It moves, layer by layer, from the final stage of *joking* (the tendentious wit of clowns), to the intermediary stage of *jesting*, (the contained carnivalesque laughter of the winged aerialiste), to reveal the initiary primitive stage termed *play*, a childish *joie de vivre* and playful pleasure of non-sense at the heart of the self-freaking narrative.[112] The narratorial voice's switch from the 'first person singular' voice in Fevvers' interview featuring the first part, to the the 'third person singular' narration predominating the rest of the book, this change from 'I' to 'she,' may even suggest that the narrator-heroine applies an infantile self-denomination as the only apt means of self-expression in an autobiografictional writing fuelled by a childish, playful frenzy of laughter.

NC is a polyphonic narrative of laughters embracing nearly all forms of human merriment described by laughter theoreticians—including humorous-, social-, ignorance-, derision-, anxiety-, apologetic-, embarassment-resolving, tickling laughters (see Chapman-Foot 1996). It revels in the vulgar and ironic, enchanted and uncanny, liberatory and corrective, frivolous and frightened, delirious and bitter, carnivalesque and grotesque, spectacular and performative, burlesque and hilarious laughters analysed above. Although *NC* clearly peaks in Fevvers's delirious tornado of laughter, and is most troubled by the centrally positioned, yet internally excluded macabre clown-jokes; the self-freaking, comic body-text hides an other narrative engine promising primary pleasures of an infantile laughing fit that, as an expressions of pure *joie de vivre*, may lead us beyond meaning, narrative and truth, back to times when, 'we had not been in need of jokes in order to be fully happy' (see Freud 1982).

V. Story-telling as Flirtation. Grotesque Bodies' and Twinned Selves' Vital-Fatal Seductions in Angela Carter's *Wise Children*

> "The strength of the feminine is that of seduction." (Baudrillard 1990)
> "The vamp does not make excuses, does not stare hesitated at the usher-boy: 'do I have my ticket reserved here, please?' The vamp enters, unavoidable. She makes her presence felt. She leaves her traces behind. She reads, writes. Primarily, she writes." (Maszárovics 2005, 1)[113]

WC's[114] narrator is a tempting teller of tall tales, Dora Chance who on her very 75th birthday (that is also her father's, Sir Melchior Hazard's 100th and Shakespeare's birthday, one 23rd of April sometime in the early 1990s) undertakes to pen down one and a half century

of family history, intertwining the saga of the illustrious Shakespearian theatrical dynasty of the Hazards and her own career story as an illegitimate daughter and a dance-hall-girl starring in the famed duo of the identical twin Chance sisters. Dora, Aging Woman, Unruly Woman, one Half of a pair of Doubled selves of Identical Twins fuses the stereotypical grotesque codings of the female body in Western culture (see Russo 1995, 15). Yet, with a *différance*, she is also a septuagenarian seductress, a comic *femme fatale*, similar yet asymmetrically singular ("identical, well and good, Siamese no" (2)), a doubled yet unique artist of self-fashioning. With her series of performances she presents subversions of femininity, subjectivity, corporeality and representation, to widen identity- and body-political options for women. A coquette and capricious chronicler of her times, introducing herself as a "drunk [old bag] in charge of a narrative" (158), Dora is an unreliable narrator deliberately teasing her readers. A working class, penniless, unacknowledged, illegitimate daughter, a licentious and unruly song-and-dance-performer of popular entertainment, bastard by birth and by profession, female and old, outcast by gender and age, Dora speaks up from the perspective of the multiply-marginalized other, inherently located on "left hand side," "the wrong side of the tracks," "the bastard side of Old Father Thames" (1), rebelliously "revelling in her wrong-sidedness" (Webb 1994, 282). Hers is a carnivalesque voice that overturns hierarchies, relativizes differences, celebrates solidarity, and by challenging patriarchally canonized narrative traditions, autobiographical and historiographical conventions, or engendered phallogocentric representations of his-stories. She seduces her readers in a text marked by a recurring key sentence cheering "What a joy it is to dance and sing!" (5, 34, 232) A 'woman-writer-in-process,' she transforms the genre of the *narrative of the self* into a hide-and-seek play of 'now you see me/us/them, now you don't,' and turns story-telling into flirtation in a grotesque, self-freaking metamorphosis of selves and texts.

1. Auto-portraits of a Seductress: (Un)making the *Femme Vitale*

In *WC* Dora Chance unveils a vivid series of auto-portraits succeeding to each other within the range of 75 years' lifetime. She is witnessed in her maturing from stage-struck child and ballet nymphette to fashionable dance-hall girl, Hollywood movie starlet, performer in vaudeville touring revues and topless showgirl in war charity matinees, to retired "old dame." However, Dora's autobiography is not as much a *Bildungsroman*—although Dora does mature by becoming more ironic and sceptical about universal myths such as fatherhood—but her narrative is rather a retrospective celebration of an invariant *identity theme* unifying her self, and coherently organizing its narratives. This theme, constituting the

'core' (Norman Holland's *identity theme*) of Dora's heterogeneous character, as well as the unifying principle pattern (Hollandian *central theme*) (see Holland 1975) of her tangled narrative of the self is a singing and dancing, joyous performance of the 'art of seduction.'

As Dora is "destined from birth to be a lovely ephemera of theatre" (58), a light-hearted, dancing seductress, not even old age can disallow her from her status of enchantress. Already, her birth is accompanied by an air of enchantment: the stopping of bombs, the singing of kids in the streets, the animation of inanimate objects performing a dance inviting to the enjoyment of everyday pleasures, irresistibly embracing corpus, soul and style alike. ("Monday, washday. What a sight! All over Brixton, long black stockings stepping out with gents' longjohns, striped shirts doing the Lambeth Walk with flannel nighties, French knickers doing the cancan with the frilly petticoats...The sun shone, the kids were singing." (26)). In the final shot, at the end of her narrative, the 75 years old Dora disappears in moonlit streets as a wise child again. She is self-consciously self-same, hugging her sister, pushing a baby carriage, and singing the same "silly old song about Charlie Chaplin and his comedy boots all the little kids were singing and dancing in the street the day [they] were born" (231) to celebrate her last seduction (her lovemaking with her 100 years old father's twin brother, Uncle Perry), and to herald new pleasures of life, seducing new possibilities and possible new seduction-stories (promised by the illegitimate Hazard twin infants, in need of her (foster)-(m)otherly care).

Since it is a musical and passionate text, Dora in her finale performs the central melodic theme of all the songs of the Chance girls' life, "I can't give you anything but love, baby" (33, 231). It is a seducing song that accompanies them from age seven to their seventies, and outlines their performed persona as Grotesque Seductress, Comic *Femme Fatale, Femme Vitale.* A primal association with the song is an early memory of the twin kids, Dora and Nora, stark-naked apart a pirate hat and eye-patch, doing the first instinctive song-and-dance gestures to the sounds of a newly received gramophone to charm Uncle Perry first visiting them. This melodic memory fuses with the narrative present's final—equally grotesque—freeze-frame image of the doubled sexy septuagenarians, "mini-skirted senior citizens on teetering heels" (200), looking "like wizened children got up in (their) mum's clothes for a dare...hearts brimming over" (217), singing the same song to celebrate Dora's last geriatric yet passionate flirtation with Peregrine, this "curtain call of (her) career as lover," commemorating all the loves of their lives (221).

Dora, a natural-born yet self-made, instinctive yet theatricalized, aging yet atemporally eternal enchantress, refutes all the conventional stereotypes of the patriarchally-conceived mythical Seductress who ravishes all members of the stronger sex. She is not particularly

beautiful, young, submissive, dumb or evil. She is neither a mindless sex bomb, a compliant muse, a glorified housekeeper, nor a shark-hearted, man-eater vamp threatening with castration, or a sick narcissist absorbed in her own image. On the contrary, she bears a constellation of qualities Betsy Prioleau describes in her cultural study on actual "world-beater enchantresses" throughout history as *par excellence* features of 'The Seductress.' She is a "myth-busting non-beauty, senior, witty, creator, politica and bravura adventurer"—androgynous, noncomformist, supravital, self-actualizing and far from being perfect. (see Prioleau 2003, 8) Dora's version of the Seductress is definitely not that of the Bad Girl or the Submissive Angel but that of Woman on Top. She embodies Prioleau's *femme vitale*, a liberated woman incarnate with the capacity to bring a man to his willing knees, and keep both genders sated, by practicing her charmeuse "mental sorcery, a cocktail of wit, eloquence, and joie de vivre" (Prioleau 2003, 13). Tellingly, Prioleau's scholarly study on the seductress is also a self-help guide for the women of today, struggling with the paradoxical positioning, impossible expectations and double standards accompanying their/our engendering.

Likewise, in my interpretation, Dora's performance of the seductress unveils a new subjectivity for women that leads from frustrating confidence crisis to the enabling womanly pleasures of confidence trick and creative self-fashioning. The Chance sisters are real *femmes vitales*[115] in the sense that they have nothing to do with classic *film noir*'s *femme fatale* figure, a lethal belle, driving men into danger, and duly punished for her uncontrollable cruel deeds fuelled by a domina's extreme sexual activity and agency, by being written out of the story, usually killed by the end of the patriarchal filmic narrative. Conventionally, the *femme fatale* becomes a screen upon which male spectators' sadistic sexual fantasies, voyeuristic desires, and death drives may be projected along with their anxieties of castration and annihilation. Although Dora and Nora almost always show up decorated by *par excellence* fetishistic props—such as high stiletto heel shoes, furs, lace underwear, mesh leotards, leather accessories—these *femme vitales* have nothing to do with the *femme fatale* described in the Freudian myth as a *fetishistic* substitute for the missing maternal penis, destined to fill in the fearful female lack and to calm masculine fears of castration. In *WC,* the ambiguity of the Freudian male fetishist's traumatic amnesia and split psyche—simultaneously aware of the existence of the female sex, *yet* in need of the fetish object to attribute her with a phallic potential comforting and satisfying him (Freud 1995, 54-56)—is ironically revisioned. His pathological pleasure is transformed into (t)he(i)r playful joy, as the Chance sisters' self-stylization as Divas with a proliferation of fetish objects plays hide and seek, both staging themselves as spectacles seducing the fetishistic (or/and voyeuristic) gaze *and* resisting its

objectification of them, by re-/de-constructing themselves as veiled enigmas insolvable by nature. Their seducing performances simultaneously highlight their own naturality *and* artificiality (paradoxically exposing the cultural process of naturalization), their knowledge *and* denial (a pragmatic, sceptic *awareness* of the 'prisonhouse' of representation, of inescapable engendering, of irrefusable ideological interpellation, of the limits of the carnival, which are nevertheless combined with *attempts* at subversion), and their repetition of stereotypical femininity *and* its feminist re-vision via the ironic, meta-, winking, grotesque quality of their self-freaking performances (identification and alienation leading to a re-definition of the self). Ironically, instead of 'lack' (with psychoanalytical metaphorics, the empty place of the missing penis), the Chance seductresses are marked by 'surplus,' being over-decorated by hyper-feminine, fetishizable props, accessories, which are stylized, staged, and re-evaluated duplicated on/by their twin selves. The *femme vitale* is very far from being a screen upon which male anxieties and desires of Death might be projected (—although Dora and her narrative have a specific relationship to Death I shall comment on in the followings). Firstly, as I will reveal, she revindicates a spectacularly active spectatorial position for herself, inaugurates enabling looks and views of her own, she looks back, but with a playful tenderness or tender playfulness, a glamorous glance, a teasing wink, a caring contemplation, which contradict the sadistically/fetishistically objectifying male gaze or the castratory fatal female gaze. Secondly, she is characterized (even at 75) by a wicked yet infantile *joie de vivre*, a vitality and powerfulness, evoking the 1940s' comics' high-heeled, scarlet lipped, sexy dressed heroines, these prototypical figures of fetish culture, who might lead, in my opinion, to a potential feminist re-reading of the concept of the fetish. The Chance sisters recall heroines like Catwoman or Wonder Woman,[116] (who, introduced in the comics' standard introductory lines as "wiser than Athena, nicer than Aphrodite, faster than Mercury, stronger than Hercules" <www.amazing-amazon.com> bears transgender, both feminine and masculine characteristics), embodying Amazonian women, who combine their hyper-femininity with conventionally masculinized activity, agency and wilful leadership to enact foremothers of the feminist heroine who does, shows, looks and sees what/as she wills.[117]

2. Cosmetic Self-Stylization as a Flirtation with the Signs of Femininity

Dora is a seductress by profession, a dance-hall-girl who grows up in the showbiz, and is thus impregnated by a 'vocational eroticism' impregnating the performance stage. On her first professional appearance in theatre, playing identical birds with Nora in *Babes in the Wood*, she already comments: "We were wet for it, I tell you! Such a rush of blood to our

vitals when we started to dance!" (61). No wonder, by the age of fifteen Dora matures into a "hardened old trooper" (77) of the seduction-business, and she never ceases to be a powerful fascinator constantly elaborating her craft of enchanting. One of her most remarkable enactments of *ars amatoria* is her stylization of the body via the art(ifice) of cosmetics. Quite tellingly, Dora's make-up constitutes the frame for the entire narrative, as the retrospective reminiscences of her life story and one-and-a-half-century of family history are inserted inbetween detailed descriptions of her applying a morning-make-up at the beginning of the novel and an evening-make-up towards the end of the novel, within the very same day, (as regards the time of the narration,) spent with preparing for her father's birthday party.

> We'd feel mutilated if you made us wipe off our Joan Crawford mouths and we always do our hair up in great big Victory rolls when we go out. We've still got lots of it, thank God, iron grey though it may be and tucked away in scarves, turban-style, this very moment, to hide the curlers. We always make an effort. We paint an inch thick. We put on our faces before we come down to breakfast, the Max Factor Pan-Stik, the false eyelashes with the three coats of mascara, everything. We used to polish our eyelids with Vaseline, when we were girls, but we gave up on that during the war and now use just a simple mushroom shadow for day plus a hint of tobacco brown, to deepen the tone, and a charcoal eyeliner. Our fingernails match our toenails match our lipstick match our rouge. Revlon, Fire and Ice. The habit of applying warpaint outlasts the battle, haven't had a man for yonks but still we slap it on. Nobody could say the Chance girls were going gently into that good night. We'd got our best kimonos on, because it was our birthday. Real silk, mine mauve with a plum-blossom design on the back, Nora's crimson with a chrysanthemum. ....Underneath, camiknickers with a French lace trim, lilac satin for me, crushed rose crepe for her. Tasty, eh? Course, we were wearing camiknickers before they came back." (6)

> Foundation. Dark in the hollows of the cheeks and at the temples, blended into a lighter tone everywhere else. Rouge, except they call it 'blusher,' nowadays. Two kinds of blusher, one to highlight the Hazard bones, another to give us rosy cheeks. Nora likes to put on the faintest dab on the end of her nose, why I can't fathom, old habits die hard. Three kinds of eyeshadow—dark blue, light blue blended together on the eyelids with the little finger, then a frosting overall of silver. Then we put on our two coats of mascara. Today, for lipstick, Rubies in the Snow by Revlon. (192)

The textual location of Dora's cosmetic preoccupations highlights their significance and already suggests the similarity between Dora's *making-up* of her face, of her self and of her text. In the followings, I demonstrate that the Chance girls' make-up as a strategy of seduction is a multi-faceted phenomenon, intertwining a grotesque corporeal revision and a resistance against being enclosed within one single, homogenizing identity category. The self-freaking nature of Chance sisters' identity is reflected in their cosmetic self-stylization that implies both being *Woman* and *a(-)woman* (in De Lauretis' sense), both being unproblematically interpellated (as feminine) yet subversively self-reflexive (as a feminist), both engendered and

performing gender-trouble, both subject to Foucauldian *technologies of power* and agent of *technologies of self.* The made-up Dora is both singular yet plural and interchangeable, both differential and relational yet communal: her 'I' becomes meaningful in its relation to (but not in its opposition against) the 'not-me,' yet is meaningless without the 'we.'

Most obviously, Dora's make-up realizes the dictionary definition of the term, by signalling an aim "to improve or to change the appearance" (Longman 2001, 867), to decorate or correct her body conforming to the culturally prescribed aesthetic standards and normative markers of her gender. With her vivid scarlet lips and heavily shadowed eyelids she emphasizes the conventionally privilegized pre-requisites of 'feminine beauty' (which evoke in the popular masculine imagery the commonplace association of the visible thus available sexually excited female genitalia, a primary locus of fantasies of the sublime, and a target of fetishistic, sadistic, anxious and abjectifying desires.) At first sight, the painted Dora seems to take on a uniformal mask of Femininity: she seemingly obeys the interpellation of the body-disciplining, engendering technologies of biopower, and occupies the essential position of *Woman* symbolizing, in Teresa de Lauretis's view, the myth of homogeneous subjection and of ideologically constituted universal femininity (De Lauretis 1987, 124).

Yet, a closer look reveals that Dora's cosmetic exercise enacts a freaking of the *beauty myth.* Dora makes up her story and her face on her 75th birthday. Hers is the allure of an un-face-lifted, wrinkled, wizened, grey-haired, retired "old dame." Her senior sex appeal challenges the ageism, the hostile "hag propaganda" (Prioleau 2003, 48) of women's beauty industry as well as the pathologisation of the postmenopausal female body. On the other hand, the 'over-beautification' with an inch-thick paint and three coats of mascara transforms her face into a grotesque mask, and turns the uniformally engendering stylization of the body into an extreme, self-refashioning, self-ironical, self-freaking performance. The overplayed make-up style is 'inherited' from Dora's foster-mother, who appoints herself a senior seductress by calling herself *Grandma* Chance, and applying an excessive amount of facial cosmetics which, although parodic in effect, nevertheless—as I will reveal in my last chapter—become a major inspiration for Dora's self- and narrative- (re/de-)constructions.

Dora constantly makes mocking meta-reflexive comments upon her/their make-up. She compares herself and Nora to female impersonators, painted harlots, (children playing) Indians in war-paint. Aware of the lipstick running down in cracks in wrinkles around her mouth, she comments self-ironically: "From a distance of thirty feet with the light behind us, we looked, at first glance, just like the girl who danced with the Prince of Wales when nightingales sang in Berkeley Square on a foggy day in London Town." (192) Like Fevvers

spectacular hyper-femininity, Dora's cosmetic exhibition of her "putting on her face" (6), "painting the faces that we always used to have on the faces we have now" (192) recalls Judith Butler's *doing gender trouble*, this parodic and political re-appropriation of the regulatory fiction of 'true' gender identity instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies. Dora's make-up is an imitative fabrication. It is a repetition of Nora's make up, that is also an imitation of Grandma's excessively stylized face, that re-presents the conventional markers of the sexually appealing women's look, that is a copy of fantasy features of the fiction of Femininity. Moreover, all these faces are replicated doubled in the mirror in front of which Dora and Nora are doing their make-ups. The painted Dora can compare herself to a female impersonator in drag, since her self-stylizing performance appears as a 'copy of the copy of the copy,' revealing that "the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an illusion" (Butler 1990, 138). Like Butler's cross-dressing, Dora's cosmetics perform gender-trouble by enabling a parodic proliferation, a perpetual displacement of images constituting a fluidity of identities, which suggest—in the Butlerian manner—an openness to re-signification, to a radical rethinking of (de)naturalized categories of identity, gender and desire.

Dora's make-up outlines a multi-faceted mask, a Janus-face combining the mythical *Woman*'s universalizing image shared by all seductresses, and the subversive, self-ironic self-portrait of the De Lauretisian *a(-)woman*, embodying—*beyond and within* the superficial surface of *Woman*—a singular identity in its plural, heterogeneous and uncontrollable bodily reality, contemplating her identifications with *a(-)womanhood* from a meta-reflexive distance (De Lauretis 1987, 124), and a feminist *bifocal perspective* (like Fevvers in *NC)*. Dora's deliberate manifestation of her difference (from being Woman) emerges in her anti-aesthetic over-decoration of an aging, androgynous face that accomplishes a non-normative, self-freaked feminine beauty most aptly suiting her idea of her self.

Dora's make-up is plurally paradoxical. On the one hand, as a reproduction of a conventionally coded mask, it guarantees the spectacular appearance of *Woman* as a universal, symbolic entity, *and* thus entails the disappearance of the differing, singular *a(-)woman*. On the other hand, the excessive, deviating, freakish nature of the trademark-Chance-make-up allows for the appealing display of individual *a(-)woman* marked by her difference, and provokes the dissolution of the iconic *arche-Woman*'s image based on the alikeness of all members of the same sex. Thus, Dora's make-up clearly indicates a play with the signifiers of femininity. The detailed description of the cosmetic stylization of her body with frequent allusions to brand-names turns Dora's memoir into a fashion chronicle that records the compulsory corporeal markers of the Seductress of her times, and testifies the

feminized subject's commodification via beauty industries. Yet, the personal beautifying tactics in the application of the mentioned cosmetic brands prove to be the most intimate details given away by the autobiogra(fiction)al subject, a performance artist making her livelihood of self-stylization. Beauty tricks and brand-names emerge as (differential and communal) markers of the self (creating the unique, trademark 'Chance-look,' alike on the inseparable twins).

Dora's make-up stages a subjectivity-subverting confidence-trick due to the fact that these cosmetic markers of identity are repeatedly removed as the "faces are creamed off to start from scratch" (191). With Dora's erasure and redrawing of faces, a constantly dis- and re-appearing heterogeneous *subject in process* is enacted. The autobiographical subject performs its literal *de-facement* (see De Man 1979) underlining the impossibility of its being framed within any conventionally homogenizing representations. Via her make-up playing with signifiers of *(a)W^v^omanhood* and with markers of identity inscribed upon and erased from her body artificially, Dora accomplishes precisely the seductive strategy Jean Baudrillard calls in his *Seduction* an "exaltation of the malicious use of signs, a conspiracy of signs" enhancing "the destruction of every godly order, including those of seduction and desire," being invested with "the capacity immanent to seduction to deny things their truth and turn it into a game, the pure play of appearances, and thereby foil all systems of power and meaning with a mere turn of hand" (Baudrillard 1990, 2, 8). (In this sense, Dora's seducing self-stylization approaches the Bakhtinian concept of the carnivalesque, supplementing the subversive play with a political critique of engendering.) Dora is a *par excellence* embodiment of Baudrillard's *seductress*, as she is making-up her face, her femininity, her identity and her text alike in a *game of signs*, gaining a mocking mastery over the symbolic universe, becoming a "seductress of the signs themselves" (see Baudrillard 1990, 13). In Baudrillard's logic, the painted woman exaggerates her features, in the ironic artificial practice of make-up, to turn them into more than a sign, a more false than false indicator incarnating the peaks of sexuality, while simultaneously being absorbed in their simulation. Cosmetics constitute a means of defacing the face by effacing the eyes behind more beautiful eyes, cancelling the lips behind more luxuriant lips, erasing oneself into a pure appearance. (Baudrillard 1990, 94) Paradoxically, the face with make-up, this spectacularly re-*presented* mask of Femininity, charged with symbolic *meaning*, is "exhausted in its *appearance*," swallowing up the diferring self in a *void of meaning*, in an "aesthetics of *disappearance*." The seductress is "never where one expects her, and never where one wants her" (Baudrillard, 1990, 85). Dora's cosmetically stylized feminized body is made to signify

with signs denuded of their meaning, the resemblance to Woman surfaces to vanish, as the *logic of re-production* is replaced by what Baudrillard calls the *logic of seduction.*

Nevertheless, it is illuminating to see how the Chance sisters carry out a pragmatist, feminist revision of Baudrillard's apolitical theory of seduction. For Baudrillard, the negative counterpart, the very opposite of the seduction based on a *trompe l'oeil* play of removing something from the order of the visibility, is *hyper-visibility*, "constructing everything in full view" in a "baroque enterprise of over-signification" (resembling pornography). For Baudrillard, hyper-visibility can be in a figurative sense identified with the freakish grotesque, since a "culture of demonstration" is also a "culture of productive monstrosity" (Baudrillard 1990, 35), where monstration is metaphorically monstrous, thus, non-seducing, repulsive. As opposed to this, the Carterian seductresses' strategy of *over-(self-)spectacularization* means neither a loss of the enticing 'real' (private, secret) self by surrendering to the total surveillance of a Panoptic gaze, nor a self-blindening by the idiotic pleasures of the subject submerged in seemingly transparent, socially mediated simulacra why abolish the difference between reality and illusion. On the contrary, it inaugurates a meta-perspective disclosing the very process of representation and identification, whereby 'fake,' simulated (decorporealized, aestheticized, unaesthetised) body-images become tokens of identity, either fetishized or abjectified, either prescribed as normative ideals or excluded as other(ed)s (i.e. as constitutive outside). Unlike Baudrillard, who lets himself be seduced by the simulating signs taking over reality,[118] and who revels in a verbal manoeuvring using 'visibility' and 'grotesque' as mere symbols, metaphors, in Carter, the grotesque freak shows up in its full corporeal reality. Her monstrous bodies seduce by demonstrating, re-exposing beyond the inescapable simulacra of social illusions, the discursively-culturally(-normatively) constituted *yet* emphatically othered, spectacularly freaked, (re)corporeal(ized) materiality of re-embodied subjects. Dora's excessive, tempting-threatening, repressed-re-emerging, irrepresentably ob-scene and compulsively over-re-presented, desiring, deranging and decomposing body evokes nostalgic longings, socially incited fears, an ecstasy of the recognition of the 'other' within the self, and a promise of alternative perspectives. The Carterian heroine spectacularizes her self-freaked body, displays herself both as *Woman* and *a-woma^{e}n*, but her hypervisible embodiments of the 'other' always serve to call attention to the ideologically invested interconnections of visibility and power and truth-production, and to propagate the plurality, the relativity of viewpoints *along with* the stakes of the visual locations and the need for consensual solidarity. Thus, in Carter, the grotesque freakish corporeality is sentimentally located as an ethical basis of the re-embodied subjectivity, as a last residue of humanity in a vertiginious world of virtual

reality's alienating simulacra. Nevertheless, Dora's spectacular corporeal-, textual-performance's over-representations also constitutes a game of hide-and-seek whereby she discloses (and hides) too much of herself(ves) as an Enigma, insolvable by nature. She charms with ambiguity and humour, inviting her spectator-readers to bifocal pleasures, interminable re-readings, collaborative meaning(de/re)constructions, and re-embodied re-identifications of their own. She substitutes—indeed in Baudrillard's fashion—the *economy of production* with that *of gift*, *use value* with *non-productive expenditure*, order with carnival, the abstracted nude with the material corporeality, sex with seduction, the ready-made face with a masquerade of de-facing masks. The (re)production of truth-producing-blurring simulacra designed to consolidate the 'othering-based,' hegemonic social structure is replaced by a play-with-signs performed to subvert the ordered system by reintroducing the body into the realm of visibility, meaningfulness, subjectivity, and to reinforce solidarity.

3. Making Up Our-Selves: Cosmetic Reflections, Communal Identity, and the Ethics of Seduction

Even though, Dora and Nora are seemingly inseparable and completely alike in their spectacular appearances and tricky disappearances, the dissimilarity in their self-stylization bears a symbolic significance, as it marks the difference in their personalities, and is a token of their singular subjectivity, of their being similar but not identical. A symbolic significance of this sort is attributed to their distinct perfumes. It is repeatedly asserted that Dora uses Mitsouko while Nora uses Shalimar throughout their whole life, and their trademark-fragrances identify them, allowing people to tell the identical twins apart on the basis of olfactory sensation. Yet, it is very telling of the Chance sisters' playful attitude towards their flexible identities that on the most crucial occasions of their lives (usually involving intimate relations as a first lovemaking, a wedding ceremony or a reunion with a lost father) they change perfumes with each other, and thus switch identity positions. Therefore, for Dora, cosmetic self-stylization of the flesh signifies a subversive *technology of the self*, meaning the performance of operations on bodies, conduct and way of being, so as to transform oneself in order to attain a certain state of happiness, wisdom or overall self-knowledge (Foucault 1988, 18). Yet, this knowledge of oneself also implies knowing the 'other,' knowing the 'other within myself,' knowing 'them,' and most importantly, knowing 'us.' Thus, the wise Chance sisters suggest a paradoxical, grotesquely freaked version of subjectivity, proposing an identity that is simultaneously singular, relational, differential, and communal.

Dora's make-up is repeatedly doubled in Nora's face, as the Chance sisters, stars of the showbiz make their livelihood of their duality. As Dora claims, "By ourselves, neither of us was nothing much, but put us together, people blinked" (60). Accordingly, they dress alike (in silver-fox trenches, silver starred stockings and tight shiny silver mini-skirts matching their greying hair (190-191)), they dye their hair together ("She felt the future lay with blondes. Should we? Shouldn't we? One thing was certain—she couldn't do it unilaterally" (77)), and certainly they use similar make-up. They apply all feminine tricks to intensify their visually seducing *trompe l'oeil* effect. As Sarah Gamble claims, identical twins are "exact imitations of the other which is also the self," and indeed Dora and Nora, "more than one and not quite two" (Gamble 1997, 174) succeed in finding a new basis for self-identification in each other, realizing an empowering communal identity through blurring the self with the other, via a grotesque doubling and imitative self-freaking stylization of their body. Dora and Nora control their identity by mastering their *look*, and self-consciously exploiting their similarity and their difference. As Michael Hardin highlights, the spectacular maintenance of their anomalous alikeness heightens their market-value (as mythic *Femme Fatale* and *Freak*), hides their individual otherness from outside viewers, and allows for the mocking switching of their identity, while their demonstration of minor differences (different perfume, hair-ribbon) permits them to exercise control over who can know them, and enables them to become "able to take on another's life and identity, to lose one's self and find a new self, challenge the very idea of personal identity" (Hardin 1994, 79). Hardin's excellent article points out that Dora and Nora's "common individuality" embraces 'otherness' within 'Me' via a self-definition outside patriarchal institutions, and thus, assaults the masculine need for the significant 'other' necessarily marginalized to create an external definition of Himself. Hardin notes that Dora and Nora refuse the stereotypical identity categories traditionally available for women: unmarried, without children, orphans, denied by their father, and lacking a biological mother, they must find identity for themselves elsewhere, in each other. (see Hardin 1994)

It is their sisterhood othered I find particularly thought-provoking, not only as a basis of the shifting identity position analysed by Hardin, but also as a means of solidarity and a source of feminist ethics. Dora and Nora face to face, doing each other's identical cosmetics ("I did her nails, she did mine...She did my hair, I did hers." (192)) shows—besides their malleable, interchangeable identity positions—their becoming mirror images of each other. Due to their similar stylization, Dora wears the face of another person, her twin, Nora, 'other(ed)' by birth, profession, gender, age, like herself, yet self-same, like herself. Thus, Nora provides the most authentic (self-)reflection for Dora ("she's the only one who sees me

in altogether" (6)), and gains hers in return. The sisters' mutual mirroring outlines an identity that celebrates alikeness in difference (both of them aging, poor, female, vaudeville performers) and difference in alikeness (similar yet not identical: Nora uses Shalimar, Dora Mitsouko, Nora is fluxy, Dora constipated, Nora is thriftless, Dora economical, Nora's menstruation is copious, Dora's meagre, Nora says "Yes!" to life, Dora "Maybe..." (5)). The Carterian Chanceian logic introduced thinks in terms of 'we,' illustrated by Dora's exclamation: "God, *we* were *a* pretty girl!"(110) (*my emphasis*). Their mutual reflection provides a revision of contemporary psychological tenets on the mirror's function in the ego-formation. For the Chance sisters, the recognition of oneself (in the reflection provided by the other) brings instead of socialization's traumatic self-alienation (of the Lacanian mirror stage (Lacan 1992)) a *communal identity*, a *reunion in sisterly solidarity*, a *love of the other within me* "as the best part of me" (104), and a *feminist ethics* highly reminiscent of Julia Kristeva's *heretics* (her ethics) *of love*, where the repressed 'other' is revealed to be embraced as an integral part of the 'self,' in a joyous catastrophe of identity[119] (Kristeva 1987). Dora's and Nora's shared freakish grotesque bodies enabling their role reversals mark, on the one hand, carnivalesque, masquerading, nomadic subjectivities, and playfully fluid identities and, on the other hand, a sisterly solidarity, approaching self-sacrifice, where the happiness of the other predominates over the interest of the self. To satisfy Dora's yearning and make her dream come true by helping her lose her virginity on her 17th birthday, Nora lends her beloved boyfriend to her sister. In return, when Nora is proposed by the powerful cinema mogul who could foster or ruin their whole career, Dora is willing to take her place in the wedding, as Nora is already secretly engaged with her Italian sweetheart. (With a typically Carterian twist, the Nora-alter-ego Dora is finally substituted by a fake Chance twin, the cinema mogul's first wife surgically transformed into a copy of Dora and Nora, so that with the tangling of love-lines, a tripled identity effectively transgresses the boundaries of the self.)

This *sisterly ethics of sharing* constitutes the basis for the communal identity that cheats the phallogocentric logic of 'othering' subjectivities, and melts in the heterogeneous figure of the Seductress 'you and me' united by 'our' love, to create not only a subversive strategy but also an *ethics of seduction*. Although far from being a feminist ethician, Baudrillard[120] also calls the strength of the feminine that of seduction, heralding a parallel universe that can no longer be interpreted in terms of psychic relations of repression, the conscious/unconscious divide, or diacritical oppositions, but in terms of play, challenges, the strategy of appearances, and a seductive reversibility, where "the feminine is not what opposes the masculine, but what seduces the masculine" (Baudrillard 1990, 7).

The *sisterly solidarity* and the "invented" matriarchal family (35, 165) set up by Grandma Chance to embrace all female outcasts in need (from Dora and Nora's father's crippled, abandoned first wife, Lady Atalanta Wheelchair, to his second wife's, Daisy's neglected she-cat) predominates in importance over all heterosexual flirts or passions. The male partners exchanged mostly remain flat characters with anonymous names—the Blonde Tenor lent by Nora to Dora, Piano Man seduced by Nora pretending to be Dora and then passed on to the real Dora—, their overall function is to reinforce the Chance sisters' unity via their intertwined love-lives. Nevertheless, Dora and Nora's switching of identities mark by no means the victimisation of men, as the Chance seductresses care about all their conquests. A characteristic example is that of the poet Irish, one of Dora's lovers, who mis-interprets Dora as the classic *femme fatale* of *film noir*s (an irresistibly attractive, cruel, manipulative, contemptuous woman, fetishized object of masculine sexual obsession, facing men with the threat of castration, leading them into danger, disaster, and death), and coins her in his novel "the treacherous, lecherous chorus girl with her bright red lipstick that bleeds over everything, and her bright red fingernails and her scarlet heart, sex, rapacious, deceitful," vulgar, opportunist, untrustworthy and chronically insensitive to a poet's heart (119). Irish, stuck within the dichotomic, hierarchical, excluding and posessive logic of heterosexual relations, creates identity categories for himself and Dora relying on figures of the 'unruly female muse' and the 'abused, inspired male artist.' He is unable to accept the logic and ethics of seduction, in Dora's words, "I wanted nothing but happiness for poor old Irish. I was really very fond of him. But what he wanted for himself, was an infinitely renewable virgin" (153). He "keeps on insisting on forgiving [Dora] where there is nothing to forgive" (123), and fails to appreciate Dora's gesture of introducing him, on her leaving him, to Helena who does indeed fulfil the role assigned to her by becoming the desired life-long companion to Irish.

The seductresses of *WC* caringly give love to all, yet—though recalling Hélène Cixous' generous feminine sexual *economy of gift* (see Cixous 1981) as a "deconstructive space of pleasure and orgasmic interchange with the other" (Moi 1985, 113)—they do wait for a return, and are loved themselves (and are loved by themselves as well). In a Shakespearian imbroglio of intimate relations, Dora and Nora rewrite their engendered identities by being in control of their sexuality. Dora is very pragmatic in sex: by having sex with the Piano Man, she claims to pay off the instalments on a squirrel jacket received from him, her affair with Irish grants her with an A-Z introduction to *belles lettres*, and her flirt with the German Teacher means free lessons in German and Stoic philosophy. In return she gives them the pleasure granted by her spectacularly staged self. Thus, they are even. Dora resists the

heteronormative, reproductive, hierarchically gendered sexual economy by frequent allusions to diaphragms and French letters, by her disclosure of desire for other women via the eroticization of their body-parts as her half-sister Saskia's nape, sister Nora's bottom or step-mother Daisy's breasts, and by her subversive attitude to the gaze and the look, her rejection of the male gaze, accompanied by her introduction of seducing, empowering female looks, teasing glances, winking oglings and caring contemplations, which caress desired bodies.

4. Spec(tac)ular Seductions and Eyeing Enchantresses

Cunningly, Dora and Nora Chance's spectacular self-stagings as seductresses are transformed into feminist empowerment, resisting the 'male gaze' and introducing alternative, satisfactory, spectacular spectatorial positions for women. The sisters' *entrée* to their father's 100th birthday party in the guise of the doubled Septuagenarian Seductresses is a characteristic performance of the over-decorated, multi-masked, daringly designed *eyeing enchantress*, and also constitutes an enactment of the spectacularly self-freaking *feminist grotesque*. (Here, the sisters simultaneously re-embody and revision archetypical female grotesque personas of the Unruly Woman, the Aging Woman, the Doubled Woman: the Bitch, the Old Crone and the Monstress.) Therefore, this scene serves as a starting point for my analysis of critical revisions of engendered spectatorship, 'to-be-looked-at-ness' and (in)visibility in Carter:

> Up the steps we marched in unison, exhibiting our antique but not quite catastrophic legs with wild abandon, with one accord, we stripped off our silver-fox trenches and trailed them behind us, and all the flashes went off at once. I felt quite revived....hand in hand, (we) did another Hollywood ascension up the staircase although I suffered the customary nasty shock when I spotted us both in the big gilt mirror at the top—two funny old girls, paint an inch thick, clothes sixty years too young, stars on their stockings and little wee skirts skimming their buttocks. Parodies. [...] We couldn't help it, we had to laugh at the spectacle we'd made of ourselves and, fortified by sisterly affection, strutted our stuff boldly into the ballroom. We could still show them a thing or two, even if they couldn't stand the sight. (197)

A survey of cutting-edge feminist theories on the spectatorship and the gaze[121]—constituting a 'background', interface, or a context to *WC*—helps us to fully understand Carter's ironic and enabling insights on the potentials of women's looks.

According to Laura Mulvey's and Mary Ann Doane's feminist film theory, in classic narrative cinema the pleasure of looking is the privilege of the male spectator invited to identify with the male protagonist, who acts as a hero, and fulfils all his (voyeuristic, scopophiliac, sadistic, fetishistic) desires by appropriating the male gaze, actively looking upon the passive female character, who is trapped in an eroticized image designed to flatter

him. As for the female viewer, she is denied the pleasure of unproblematically positive self-identification: she may only choose between the options of the masochistic, self-objectifying identification with the object of *his* sadistic possessiveness, or the narcissistic, auto-erotic, exhibitionist identification with *his* fetish, or at most a schizophrenic, 'forced transvestite' identification with the active male hero. (see Mulvey 1991, Doane 1997) De Lauretis pursues this argumentation further by unveiling that "the causal agent, the deep structure and the generative force" of the master- and meta-narratives of Western culture is the male sadistic desire. Conforming to the Freudian Oedipal scenario's logic, the mythical subject is construed as a male hero, an active founder of social order, enactor of violence and desire. On the contrary, the subordinated female is deprived of subjectivity, reduced to the sole function of satisfying *his* desire, and identified with an element of plot-space, an abstract topos, a riddle to solve, a landscape to conquer, an obstacle to overcome, a tempting matter to resist, a mirror to reflect him, an object to exchange or posess with.[122] (De Lauretis 1984, 103-158)

In my view, *WC* is a thought-provoking text because it mocks and subverts precisely this naturalized, normative, ideologically, visually prescribed assumption (parading as commonsense fact) summarized by John Berger's famous line: "Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at." (Berger in Ussher 1997, 84). It discloses not only how the spectator/spectacle divide predetermines the distribution of power-positions within society, but also how these positionalities may be subverted. Dora Chance's narrative destabilizes the Freudian categories, which draw rigid gender distinctions by defining voyeurs and fetishists exclusively as male subjects, by regarding scopophiliac pleasure a male prerogative and solely a compensatory soothing of the castration complex's anxiety, and by necessarily attributing the fetish-object—culminating in the image of the *femme fatale*—with a feminine gender, that is in constant need of a penis-substitute to become a 'whole,' that can be then dismembered. The narrator, Dora rejects *Woman*'s representations' simplificatory objectification, as well as the female spectator's pathologizing positioning, and reclaims the pleasures of women's views by highlighting the empowering potentials of alternative, subversive, feminist ways of looking and being seen. She daringly looks back, introduces *female glances* replacing the *male gaze*. She appears and disappears as an *eyeing enchantress*, who not only hijacks the gaze, but also mockingly contemplates and presents herself, or rather her made-up persona, her 'image of the Seductress' as a spectacle, allowing for the re-definition of self- and body-image, visibility and spectatorship alike.

By performing a spectacular show of self-stylization, playfully re-inventing her *looks*, re-creating her image of *femme vitale*, Dora seduces men by the kaleidoscopic, unresolvable,

enigmatic quality of her looks. Yet she also introduces a feminist epistemology. As in De Lauretis's feminist re-imaginings of classic stories, Dora refuses to identify woman with an image to be consumed, a riddle to be solved, a question to be answered (by men) (like the Sphinx's riddle unravelled by Oedipus, making her "kill herself in disgust," or Freud's becoming an author of *Dora*'s (!) case-story in her place, or the famous Freudian question implying "what is femininity—for men?" (De Lauretis 1994, 111, 133, 152). The Carterian heroine "remains an enigma, structurally insoluble because undecidable" (De Lauretis 1994, 156). The male gaze is seduced: instead of possession, objection and control, he is invited to contemplate infinitely, to wonder, to take part in a flirtatious mutual eyeing, becoming a spectacle himself as-well. Carter's heroine shows all, but dares our imagination, and remains seducing as no Truth is ever revealed. It is never solved whether Fevvers is a real bird or a confidence-trickster, Eve/lyn a man or a woman, and Dora a seductress or a hag. All their mottos could be Fevvers': "look, but do not touch, [do not manipulate, control or close via imposing a final interpretation on my self-stylizing performance]".

Moreover, the Carterian heroine's *looks* certainly attract women, because they subvert the traditionally passive *to-be-looked-at-ness*, and break the frames of stereotypical images of femininity. The Chance sisters offer innovative, inspiring identificatory positions, by abandoning normative hierarchical categories, and starting out from *otherness*, embodied by the spectacularized self-freaking female corporeality. The self-spectacularization reveals how the freaked feminized body conventionally both constitutes the tempting-threatening focus of scopophiliac attention, *and* is rendered invisible in the cultural realm of 'normality' due to the *other*'s pathologization (her categorization as *ob-scene*) socially prescribed to guarantee her cultural legibility in the status of the illegible. Thus, her marginalization as 'other(ed) freak(ed)' defines the limits of 'meaningful' human subjectivity.[123] Yet, in Dora's feminist reinterpretation, the female grotesque becomes feminist freak who, constantly putting herself on show, becomes a source of empowering spectacularity, visibility and (in)sight for women .

Since Dora enacts simultaneously both spectator and spectacle, both on-looking subject and looked-at object, she provides a fictional illustration for De Lauretis' argument, suggesting that spectatorship is a much more complex phenomenon than being simply the function of the spectator's actual, socially prescribed gender-position—his/her personal and social semiotic history of previous identifications engendering him/her—categorized as *either* active, meaning masculine male *or* passive, meaning feminine female. De Lauretis does away with the concept of rigid, undivided, 'culturally-framed' identity as a stable unit of 'consciousness,' and regards identification—with the filmic narrative's images or with any

representations perceived—as a movement, producing a *subject-process* in a relation, allowing for "the identification [of oneself] with something other [than oneself]" (141). This clearly recalls Dora's self-freaking grotesque identity-politics. For De Lauretis and Dora, the spectator/subject/woman (or man) is a term of constantly shifting positions. The claim that "femininity and masculinity are *positions* occupied by the subject in relation to desire, corresponding respectively to the passive and active aims of the libido" (De Lauretis 1984, 143) (*my emphasis*) suggests that being active or passive, spectator or spectacle, gazing subject and othered image are not pre-given, inherent qualities or fixed, inalterable states, but changeable positionalities, which are socially, ideologically prescribed, and thus are decomposable and rewritable into personal, subjective (re)constructions. De Lauretis's female spectator engages in a twofold process of identification, as she identifies with *both* the active gaze *and* the passive image, with the subject *and* the space of narrative movement, with the figure of movement *and* the figure of closure, with the desire for the other *and* the desire to be desired by the other, with 'being the body' *and* 'doing the body' (or looking and performing the body). Hers is a *double identification* assuring a *surplus of pleasure* via her refusal of *either/or*, and her choice of *both/and.* I believe that *double identification* is a particularly convenient term to describe the Carterian heroines' relation to spectatorship and the gaze, as it also perfectly suits their subversive strategies aiming at de/re-constructing their subjectivities, corporealities and text(ualitie)s. It matches their simultaneous identification *both* with the De Lauretisian mythical *Woman and* the real, historical, material *(a)women.* It evokes their palimpsest of the ideologically prescribed 'writing on the body' *and* the counter-productive, subversive 'writing from the body:' their combination of the cultural embodiment of a feminimized, conventionally female grotesque (i.e. abject, objected, othered) subjectivity *and* the self-freaking re-embodiment or self-decomposition of a feminist, revolutionary, freak subjectivity. It explains their bifocal perspective resulting from their location *both* within the feminine literary tradition *and* the re-location by the feminist metatext. Although De Lauretis regards women's double identification a result of the operation of the ideological technology of gender underlying narrative and cinema, so as to solicit the spectators' consent and "seduce women into femininity," but, along with the Carterian heroines, I emphasize the surplus of pleasure accompanying double identification as another proof of the subversion's inherently infiltrating and bursting, shattering the system that tries to contain and control it in vain.

Dora's, Fevvers's and Eve/lyn's *feminist freak* differs from Mary Russo's *female grotesque* in the sense that while Russo claims that for woman making a spectacle out of herself inevitably entails her being identified with the blameworthy female grotesque, and

thus being ridiculised, abused and objectified by the normative, restrictive male gaze (Russo 1995, 53),[124] the Carterian heroines opt precisely for the opposite, for an extreme self-spectacularization. The mock-ecstatic displaying of oneself, through autobiografictional over-verbalizations and excessive corporeal performances enables plural subversions for the Carterian feminist grotesque, self-freaking heroine. She is enabled to reveal the narcissistic relation to and the illusory, malleable nature of the image destined to represent but desperately displacing the unframeable heterogeneous self. She is able to undermine the social myth reducing woman to a spectacle defined solely by the male gaze, to question the gendered distribution of visual powers, and to highlight the political significance of self-re-representation. Most importantly, she can spectacularly start out self-definition 'from the side of the other(ed freak),' and to challenge her exclusion from the realm of invisibility, to rewrite ideologically prescribed cultural embodiments and representations, and to fight the hegemonic domineering identity politics based on the self/other differentiation.

The (initial quotation's) Septuagenarian Seductresses' spectacular appearance instead of marking humiliation, signals in Jeffery Roessner's words "a challenge to [the] invisibility" (Roessner 2002, 113) granted by their gender, age, social and familial position, all guaranteeing their exclusion from *his*tory. (In Dora's words: "even dressed up like four-penny ham-bones, our age and gender still rendered us invisible...as a general rule, we debate invisibility hotly" (199)) For Dora—a poor, working class, illegitimate, old, female—becoming a spectacle exploits the political potential of the body's stylization by constituting an attempt to 'write back herself,' her stories and her views into history, to reclaim her visibility along with her narrative agency. As her self-reflexive comment on their grotesque *entrée* shows, their redesigned seductresses' looks allows her to perform a 'visual revolution' with considerable gender-political implications: "We couldn't help it, we had to laugh at the spectacle we'd made of ourselves and, fortified by sisterly affection, strutted our stuff boldly into the ballroom. We could still show them a thing or two, even if they couldn't stand the sight" (198). Dora "hijacks the specular gaze" (Gamble 1997, 175) and *looks back* by transforming her *female grotesque* self from the status of the *looked-at-object* to that of the *self-freaked feminist, showing subject* who performs a series of revelatory and revisionary self-exhibitions to highlight the ideologically invested nature of perception, and to direct looks by reintroducing the perspectives of the 'other' within conventional, normative ways of seeing. By spectacularly staging her freaked self, she parades as the grotesque other, the freak, whom Elizabeth Grosz describes as the fascinating and repulsive 'in-between being,' who transgresses borders, which divide the subject from ambiguities beyond normal, knowable

human subjectivity, and outside its corporeal limits effecting the lived and represented identity (Grosz 1996, 57). As a 'half' of a set of identical twins Dora troubles the opposition distinguishing one being from another. She crosses the boundary between youth and old age, child and adult, the mini-skirted nymphette and the wrinkled octogenarian, her cosmetic over-decoration simultaneously evokes the former's inexperienced innocence and the latter's senile corruption or decay. She occupies the "impossible middle-ground" between enticing seductress and sickening hag. Her irrepressible *joie de vivre* and her repeated evocation of death sanctioning, legitimizing her story of/and her life destroy the divide between life and death. As a natural child and a connoisseur of artifice by profession, bastard and show-biz actress she violates the nature versus culture opposition. With her stereotypically engenderable comportments of 'feminine' caring mothering, beautificatory self-stylization, and her 'masculine' activity, agency and authorship—especially at the end of the story, when she becomes with Nora both mother and father of their adopted "wise children"—she even shatters the sexes' antithesis. Her autobiografictional narrative and corporeal performances oscillate between incompatible contrasts of authentic self and made-up image, carefully conceived role-playing, mingling truth and fiction, authenticity and performance, self and other. Paradoxically, Dora displays herself as the looked-at who also looks back at the gazing spectator, and looks at herself too, and watches herself being looked at as 'other.' Thus, she arrives to conclusions concerning the controlling, curious gaze directed at, or rather imposed upon the other(ed) freaks who obsess the gaze by their ambiguity, their "imperilling the very definition we rely on the classify humans, identities, and sexes—our [social existence's] most fundamental categories of self-definition and boundaries dividing self from otherness" (Grosz 1996, 57). Dora unveils that the spectacle of the female grotesque body, seen as an 'othered' freak, is socially abused to reinforce the limits of subjectivity, cultural embodiment, representation and invisibility. Fulfilling the function of Butler's *constitutive outside*, 'other(ed)s' are rendered ob-scene, irrepresentable, invisible in terms of normality, as they are normalized as pathologized, are attributed legibility by being labelled illegible, are contained by exclusion (see Butler 1993, 3). Simultaneously, they constitute the kernel of voyeuristic (fetishtic, scopophiliac) fascinations by embodying the 'invisible absence' haunting the visibly present representation, the subject's abject aspect, its grotesque double or alien otherness, displaying itself as an integral part of the subject, while tempting and threatening by overwhelming "the self that wants to see itself reflected" (Grosz 1996, 65). In my view, Dora highlights precisely what Elizabeth Grosz ingeniously summarizes:

> The viewer's horror lies in the recognition that this monstrous being [Dora's spectacularized freaked female corporeality] is at the heart of his or her own identity, for it is all that must be ejected or abjected from self-image to make the bounded, category-obeying self possible. In other words, what is at stake in the subject's dual reaction to the freakish or bizarre individual is its own narcissism, the pleasures and boundaries of its own identity, and the integrity of its received images of the self. (Grosz 1996, 65)

Dora refutes the authoritative power-position of the omniscient, discriminatory, disembodied "cyclopean, self-satiated eye of the master subject" (Haraway 1996, 256) and heralds the subjective viewpoint, the limited perspective of her regained female autobiographical voice. She makes self-ironical, metatextual comments upon her admittedly unreliable representations of their *trompe-l'oeil*-like corporeal inscriptions. Paradoxically, her experiences are both subjective, as 'lived' in her own bodily reality, and quasi-objective, as witnessed on her identical twin sister's similar performance. These two perspectives add up the bifocal view that characterizes her entire narrative. By placing her freakish body as spectacle to be looked at and as source of her (in)sight, Dora's performance recalls Donna Haraway's insistence on the *embodied nature of all vision*, and her feminist doctrine of *embodied objectivity*. Her *situated knowledges* and *limited perspectives* "reclaim the sensory system that has been used to signify a leap out of the marked body and into a conquering gaze from nowhere," and reject the supreme male gaze—"the unmarked position of Man and White," "the masculinist cannibal-eye fucking the world," "the god trick of seeing everything from nowhere"—"that mythically inscribes all the marked bodies, that makes the unmarked category claim the power to see and not be seen, to represent while escaping representation" (Haraway 1996, 249). Refusing the *nowhere* of the transcendental privileged male gaze and the interchangeable *anywheres* of irresponsible, stake-less postmodern relativism, Dora—along with Haraway's feminist—situates her onlooker/looked-at self in her own specific *somewhere*, a partial, locatable, critical stance, from where she learns with solidarity's loving care how to see faithfully from another's point of view. Haraway's and Carter's embodied spectatorship encourages the playful proliferation of diverse limited perspectives, which always consider the looked-at object an agent, not a screen, a ground or a resource, and which unite all by a solidarity and empathy for all 'views from elsewhere.' Their main aim is the establishment of partial connections, power-sensitive conversations and caring communities, embracing—with a sisterly solidarity—the freaked other just as much as the self-same.

Dora performs a symbolic enucleation, castration of the demythologized male gaze when she describes her famous womaniser father's "knicker-shifting, unfasten-your-brassiere-from-the-back-of-the-gallery eyes" as the bitterest disappointment of her life, because "those

eyes off his looked at us but could not *see* us" (72). The macho seducer's gaze is precisely the opposite of the seductress' glance, as its view lacks love and thus fails to see the other as part of himself. Melchior cannot recognize his own daughters, or by pretending so he cannot think in terms of a 'we,' a caring communal identity. Accordingly, he is incompetent in identifying the 'other' in/or himself, his gaze can never see the world in its complexity.

In *WC* the *male gaze* always appears tamed. In fact, the seductresses' performance deliberately courts the male gaze to be inspired by it. The implied motto of Dora and Nora's seduction seems to elaborate on the winged Fevvers' slogan ("Look, but don't touch!"), by inviting to "look, touch and (let) go!"—daring, trusting, unafraid to be trapped as object of spectacle. On Dora's last, most memorable lovemaking the centenarian Uncle Perry embodies all Dora's former lovers, so that she imagines him to be her first lover, "that blue-eyed boy" able to reflect in his eyes Dora as a desiring and desired young girl. (221) Dora challenges and teases the 'male gaze' by spectacularly displaying her seductress-self's *creative female look* to provoke a *mutual eyeing* that becomes a source of shared pleasure. In the common specular joy, the boundaries of the rigid male subjectivity are destabilized as Perry, under Dora's influence, opens up to the 'other' to become a heterogeneous receptacle, resonator of Dora's memories. (Perry "was himself, when young, and also...a kaleidoscope of faces, gestures, caresses...all the loves of my life at once" (221)), In his loving eyes Dora can truly recognize herself, as he mirrors her 'identity-theme' of the desiring and desired, carnivalesque licentious yet caring *seductress in process*, embraced with her similar sister in a communal identity. ("He really, truly loved us and so he saw no difference, he saw the girls we always would be under the scrawny, wizened carapace that time had forced on us for, although promiscuous, he was also faithful, and, where he loved, he never altered, nor saw any alteration" (208).)

I disagree with Kate Webb who argues that the reflection of the young, seducing Dora in Perry's eyes refers to the recollection of a past traumatic sexual experience, namely her being abusively raped at thirteen by her uncle. This outrageous harassment, in Webb's view, underlines the carnivalesque's malicious effect on female sexuality. (Webb 1994, 301-306) I think that Webb fails to remark that in her reminiscences Dora reconstructs herself as 'always-already-a-seductress' with a feminist, empowering carnivalesque relation to sexuality (—which, nevertheless, is not lacking a pragmatic and caring feminist ethical aspect, making Dora wisely claim during their "last fling" with Perry that there are limits to the carnival, in so far as anything can be done, *provided* no one gets hurt, and no harm is done to others). Considering that throughout her whole life the seductress Dora chooses her partners actively and takes her part of the pleasures, it seems more likely to me that her nostalgic

commemoration evokes not so much her first seduction *by* Perry but her first seduction *of* Perry, or at most, their mutual seductions. Accordingly, her sexual agency, this carnivalesque sexuality allows the *femme vitale* Dora to commit a multiple violation of norms surrounding sexuality by recalling two licentious, non-reproductive, incestuous sexual encounters, a juvenile flirt echoed in a geriatric passion. Moreover, Dora turns her very autobiografictional narrative into flirtation, augmenting the seductive quality of her story-telling by introducing in her text a playful oscillation between remembering and mis-remembering, between recalling yet deliberately destabilizing the memory of their first (imagined or real) lovemaking with Perry. ("...I couldn't for the life of me remember sleeping with him before and I shocked myself, to have forgotten that—if I had forgotten, that is... to have forgotten whether I ever slept with my beloved Perry... You never forget the first time. I'll never forget the last time, either." (219))[125] Besides its metamorphic self-stylization, gender-troubling subversiveness and unrestricted licentiousness, Dora's empoweringly carnivalised sexuality embodies a *metaphysical erotics* described by Georg Simmel as the most sophisticated form of erotica that signifies loving the beloved through the whole world, and loving the whole world in the beloved (Simmel 1996, 124). This passion for life, this loving against all odds, this courage to face the darkest and brightest sides of human existence is a fundamental characteristic of the lives and loves of the Chance sisters that is illustrated by Dora's comments on Nora's (her mirror image's) early sexual experience with the aging Pantomime Goose:

> Don't run away with the idea that it was a squalid, furtive, miserable thing, to make love for the first time on a cold night in a back alley with a married man with drink on his breath. He was the one she wanted, warts and all, she would have him, by hook or crook. She had a passion to know about Life, all its dirty corners, and this is how she started, in at the deep end, for better or worse, while I stood shivering on the edge like the poor cat in the adage. (81)

While Nora becomes familiar with the dirty corners of the beloved life, Dora stands guard on the edge of the alley, peeping from one corner of her eyes the mating couple, while from the other corner of her eyes watching out for the Pantomime Goose's jealous, raging wife. These *furtive sidelong glances* of the watchwoman Dora are later on elaborated into a seductive strategy of the *eyeing enchantress*. Dora's female glance is the exact opposite of the *male gaze*, as it does not seek to objectify, fetishize, possess, or frame within arbitrary, symbolic meanings, but instead coquettishly winks, thoughtfully muses, mockingly ogles and lovingly contemplates, specularly caressing the male body invited to share her (ocular) pleasures. Dora's look on her first lovemaking with the blonde tenor exemplifies this playful

and blissful female glance. Hers is the *seduction of the eyes* that Baudrillard describes as "the most immediate, the purest form of seduction, one that bypasses words[;]where looks alone join in a sort of duel, an immediate intertwining, unbeknownst to others and their discourses: the discrete charm of a silent and immobile orgasm," or "a tactility of gazes that sums up the body's full potential[...]in a single, subtle instant" (Baudrillard 1990, 77).

> He went to have a wash in the basin, first, while *I stripped off and lay on the sofa watching him*[...]He was too young for body hair. His tender flesh was all rosy in the light behind him. He smiled as he came towards me. It stuck out like a chapel hat peg. What did? What do you think? *I couldn't keep my eyes off it*[...]There was a little clear drop of moisture trembling on the tip, it came to me to lick it off. He gave a gasp. His nipples were quite stiff, too. He was shivering a bit[...]Skin like suede. *Eyes the blue of the paper bags* they used to sell you sugar in, years ago...He sighed, *his eyes rolled back so you could see the whites. Eyelashes a foot long.* Some things you can't describe...Afterwards, *I pretended to be asleep*, I didn't dare talk.[...]*I watched him secretly between my lashes.* He gave me another kiss and *a big smile he thought I couldn't see...* (85) (*my emphasis*)

The eye of the seductress has visual pleasures of her own by daring to look back with a loving female leer that embraces the spectacularised male body, and has the capacity to tame the 'male gaze''s aggressive voyeur-eyes by closing them, in order to open him up for her vision of shared bliss. Dora's female glance deliberately squints, so as to hide her ocular potential, and to destabilize the hierarchical power positions of the 'seer' and the 'seen.' This way, behind the trademark coquettish winking, the furtive sidelong glances and of the self-observing mirror-mania of the seductress, there lies a complex feminist politics that revises the spectacularity, the visibility and the spectatorship, or the visual (interpretative, meaning-generating) potential of the traditionally dichotomic gender positions.

Although, I have interpreted the *femme vitale*'s corporeal-, textual- seductions mainly within a heterosexual frame, I find important to highlight Dora's potential *queer* pleasures and (sexually-)alternative perspectives, as a thought-provoking issue that could be the subject of a further analysis. The flirtatiously self-spectacularizing Dora's excitement *by* and *of* female readers, spectators, and co-actresses, her concern with female bonds, sisterly solidarity, womanly community, her rejection of patriarchally prescribed gender norms and divisions, and, in a way, even her unrestrained love for Nora, all immediately associate Dora with the classic *femme* figure of the *femme-butch* lesbian relationship. As Heidi Levitt, Elisabeth Gerrish and Katherine Hiestand state, from the very beginnings—their first *coming out* granting visible takes place in the US of the late 1940s—*butch-femme* lesbian couples "organize against heterosexual dominance" (Levitt 2003, 2), challenge norms of female

sexuality, and give 'feminine' signifiers a new meaning by defining themselves via fulfiling roles where the *butch*'s 'masculine' protection and aggression corresponds to the *femme*'s exaggerated femininity (bright lipstick, high heels, etc), seductiveness, and emotional solace within a community geared for resistance. This re-enacted *femme*-inity differentiated from stereotypical, passive femininity, this being femme that a contemporary *butch-femme* website (www.butch-femme.com) calls "the fully realized queer state of one's femininity, sexuality and sensuality as it pertains to self, unapologetic and non-patriarchally based or constructed" clearly reminds of Dora's performance of the spectacular, seducing, caring *femme vitale* (— and might lead to a revisionary re-reading not only of *WC*, but of the Carterian oeuvre on the whole). But if both of the Chance sisters enact the role of the *femme*, who is the *butch*?—one might ask. I think that, proving her irony again, Carter, or the narrator Dora posits the reader of her text as a *butch,* who inescapably, aggressively imposes a meaning, a mis-reading upon her text—limiting the playful proliferation of possible meanings inherently embedded within and seductively vibrating her text—out of pure love, to protect her, to keep her from fading, forgetting, falling apart, and to preserve her as an eternal seductress for/of his readerly self.

5. The Art of Flirtation: The Allumeuse Body

The Chance sisters' simultaneous seducing invitation and mocking rejection of the 'male gaze,' their feminist performance of 'femininity 'with a twist' associates them with the *allumeuse*, described by Martha Noel Evans as the woman who is firing up men only to say them 'no' in the end, who poses herself "*as object of desire for another*," but also limits the objectification of her self by insisting on her subjectivity. As Evans stresses and as the Chances demonstrate, her status as a subject may be flamboyant, exaggerated, and even caricature-like or hysterical, yet it is always affirmed in an emphatic, undeniable way. (Evans 1989, 78) This ambiguity of the *allumeuse*'s corporeal performance lies at the very heart of the spectacularly-specularly empowering, trademark Carterian (Chanceian) art of flirtation.

The female glance plays a vital role in Georg Simmel's 1909 study on the psychology of flirtation. According to Simmel, the essence of flirtation is not a simple desire to please, but instead constitutes a complex dynamics of the complementary self-contradictory attitudes of the seductress, who says both 'yes' and 'no' by alternatively or simultaneously inviting and rejecting male advances. The attraction of flirtation and the main point of the game—in this risky, ludic form of love beyond all pornographic passion—lies in the interconnectedness of the promise of an appealing easy triumph and the utter impossibility of the conquest. (Simmel 1996) Entering the game of flirtation, playing for the favours of a capricious seductress allures

by this strange antithetical synthesis, the tension of the unknowable, the stimulating 'perhaps' coded in the very name of the seductress *Chance* sisters. (The word 'Chance' implies 'luck' referring to the pleasures promised by the enchantresses, contrasting the ominous danger embedded in the patronym of the 'Hazard' family.)

Simmel's enumeration of the three major 'strategies of seduction' performed by the coquette woman—the *furtive glance*, the *swaggering walk* and the *pretence to be preoccupied with insignificant phenomena*—recall tactics Dora and Nora practice at an advanced level.

The furtive sidelong glance from the corner of the eye marks a simultaneous 'turning towards' and 'turning away' as the glance focuses the attention on the person to be seduced, yet the body posture denies this attention by turning in the reverse direction, opposite to the glance. This ephemeral devotion and immediate disavowal is enacted in Dora's "roving eye" on her first glimpsing at the instantly seduced Irish: "he was the one whom Perry picked out for most conversation, and I would watch them from the corner of my eye even when some assistant producer, or stunt man, or second lead had his leg wedged in my thigh, talk about dancing being sexual intercourse standing upright" (118)

The swaggering walk with swinging hips—called in fashion slang the 'va-va-voom, shake-it-like-you-might-break-it walk'—emphasizes the sexually exciting body parts via a telling choreography promising pleasures, but in the meanwhile keeping a distance and restraint characterizing the cool vamp. On arriving to New York, Dora and Nora perform precisely this vibrating walk staging the sensual rhythm of flirtation:

> ...in our best suits—Schiaparelli, I kid you not—charcoal wool, fox wrap collar and cuffs, buttons, typical Schiap touch, in the shape of crochets and quavers, soft little high-crowned hats pulled down over our left eyes. Look hot, stay cool, we'd instructed one another, we'd got the stance to match the suits off pat, you stuck your hipbone forward, let your shoulders droop, put all your weight on the one leg (112)

The flirtatious strategy of pretending to be preoccupied with insignificant phenomena, the faked attention paid to the minor props in the scenario of seduction—such as flowers, pets, children, or food and drinks on parties as in Dora's case—suggests that these 'sweet nothings' interest me more than you, yet my caring about them is a play that I perform uniquely for you, so as to evoke your curiosity and elicit your attention. On the second occasion, when Dora, pretending to be Nora, seduces the blonde tenor, who this time is doubling as a waiter, she seems to apply this very tactic when she claims: "I couldn't fancy swan,' I said to the waiter. 'Too many feathers. Have you got anything else a girl could nibble'" (99). A more 'advanced' form of this preoccupation with unimportant props of seduction is the flirtation with someone

in order to seduce an other for whom the whole coquetterie is performed. Accordingly, on the Twelth Night Costume Ball organized in Melchior Hazard's domicile, at the "residence of the Royal Family of the British Theatre" Nora's flirtatious dance with the cinema mogul Genghis Khan and Dora's seduction of the blonde tenor is spectacularly staged in front of the eyes of the patriarch. Dora and Nora, besides their hunger for pleasure, seem to be driven by an Oedipal desire, craving for their treacherous and negligent father's attention (—despite the fact that from the very beginnings they also demythologize fatherhood, and prevent the fulfilment of the Oedipal scenario by knowing all the way through [via an intuition ironically hinted at repeatedly, then explicitly verbalized in their conclusion] that the supreme Father is a ridiculous cultural artefact, a social fiction, no more than a "papier-maché figure" (230).)

The comic *femmes fatales, femme vitales* perform their roles perfectly and provoke Melchior's male gaze with a spectacle from which he cannot avert his bedazzled eyes. Instead of the ideologically prescribed passive 'to-be-looked-at-ness,' they actively perform (ironically over-)spectacularized versions of their selves, and gain empowerment by re-creating their looks, managing their images, and governing the gazes directed at them. The power of the daughters' passion burns the Father's patriarchal mansion down both literally and metaphorically. Literally, the fire is started by Genghis Khan's cigar abandoned on the edge of the tablecloth when Nora invites him to dance, while the blonde waiter is unable to fight the flames as he is busy making love with Dora who has seduced him. Symbolically, the fire of the enchantresses' passion breaches the Oedipal contract that guarantees the 'normal' (patriarchally sanctioned) psychosexual maturing and social positioning conforming to the hierarchically gendered, heteronormative, reproductive economy (that consistently promises the fulfilment of *his* desire by *her(s)* subordination). Dora and Nora are in De Lauretis' fashion "Oedipal with a vengeance:" they embody loving daughters, yet refuse the patriarchally femininized passivity, they dispute the masculine (fatherly) monopolization of the story's authorship, and, in their story, "stress the duplicity of that scenario, and [its] contradiction by which historical women must work with and against Oedipus" (De Lauretis 1984, 157). The rebellious daughters unleash a madly mocking masquerade of pleasurably proliferating self-freakings within their father's lawn—a carnivalesque space of 'contained outside'—where everyone is invited to join the carnivalesque orgy celebrating the seduction of empowering female glances and grotesque spectacles.

> The tenor and me weren't the only ones who'd succumbed to nature, either....Out of the corner of my eye, I spotted Coriolanus stoutly buggering Banquo's ghost under the pergola

> in the snowy rose-garden whilst, beside the snow-caked sundial, a gentleman who'd come as Cleopatra was orally pleasuring another dressed as Toby Belch. ...I spied with my little eye an egg-shaped depression in a snowdrift on the parterre surmounted by the lead soubrette who was grinding away for dear life in the woman-on-top position and it turned out the moaning recipient of her favours was who else but my now definitively ex-lover, his cap was gone, but his bells were all tinkling... (103)

Dora and Nora fully realise the self-consciously dualistic behaviour of the seductress in the unstable game of 'yes' and 'no,' the spectacular fluctuation of devotion and rejection characterising the *art of flirtation*. Yet, this 'erotic dynamics' maintained by the seductress via "the perpetual light show of alternating solace and anxiety, quiescence and ecstasy, intimacy and distance, pleasure and pain" (Prioleau 2003, 14) lies not only at the heart of the Chance girls' bodily performance but also constitutes the engine of the entire (com)plot of seduction, governs the narrative- structure, style and voice alike, turning story-telling into flirtation.

6. Narrative as Seduction, Story-telling as Flirtation

The complex dynamics of the enchantress' craft's contradictory yet complementary strategies surface thematically on the level of the plot intertwining several stories of seduction. Even more fascinatingly, the dynamics of seduction turn into a 'textual-motor,' self-consciously (mock)capriciously directing narrative-structure, writing-style and narrative voice alike. The seductress' game based on the provocative fusion of passionate devotion and standoffish reservedness can be traced in the functioning of the exciting narrative, the weaving of the vibrating text, and the grotesque ambiguity of the narrative voice. The narrative oscillates between the urge to be acknowledged by the father and the ritual deconstruction of patriarchy. It combines the eulogy of the canonized Bard and the campification of Shakespeare, reclaimed as pop-cultural, recyclable item. It marks a memento to hegemonic English culture and a carnivalesque upheaval of social order and tradition. The narrative, imitating the winking, swinging, toying doubled body-manoeuvres of the coquette Chance twins, flickers between tragedy and comedy, chronicle and tall-tale, history and gossip, realism and magic, sincere autobiography and self-made myth, melancholic necrology and zestful hymn to life. The narrative voice fluctuates between singularity and polyphony, trustworthiness and unreliability, loquaciousness and secrecy, intimacy and reticence. As a sustained autobiographical voice it interpellates to identification and as a metafictional voice it alienates, inviting to a distanced self-reflection. The narrative enacts the seductress *par excellence*: it stirs up and turns down, seduces and rejects its readers whimsically, and thus maintains the text in a constant excitement, more pleasurable than satisfaction. Dora Chance's

story told and story-telling turn into veritable flirtation, as the narrative stages what Baudrillard calls the sole strategy of the seductress: "to be-there/not-there, and thereby produce a sort of flickering, a hypnotic mechanism that crystallizes attention outside all concern with meaning, characterized by an absence seducing presence" (Baudrillard 1990, 85), and thereby results in a unique enchantment by the text.

In *WC*, the flirtation on the level of the narrative, the semioticized dynamics of devotion and reservedness, is enacted by *reader teasers* (see Webb 1994, 295). *Reader-teasers* draw attention by forecasting surprising events and unexpected turns:

> Seventy-five, today, and a topsy-turvy day of wind and sunshine. The kind of wind that gets into the blood and drives you wild. Wild! And I give a little shiver because suddenly I know, I know it in my ancient water, that something will happen today. Something exciting, something nasty, I don't give a monkey's[...]Something's up! (3-4)

They elicit readers' curiosity by promising to spill all family secrets, to "have *all* the skeletons out of the closet" (5), yet they consistently postpone the moment of revelation (by sentences like "All in good time I shall reveal to you how it has come to pass..." (7) "You will find out in due course." (8), "No. Wait. I'll tell you all about it in my own good time." (13)). In order to augment teasingly the pleasurable narrative tension, Dora's storytelling often applies the "*freeze-frame*" (11) *effect*: at the peak of excitement, climactic scenes are interrupted by insignificant details. When the weeping Tristram Hazard—Melchior's youngest son, Dora and Nora's half-brother calling them aunties—announces the ominous disappearance of his beloved, the Chance-sister's goddaughter, Tiffany, Nora exclaims "But we were all a-tremble, all anxiety, what the fuck was going on? So, Nora bunged his cassette in the VCR sharpish" (10). But instead of going on describing the contents of the cassette which may provide clues having recorded Tiffany's last appearance, on her breakdown and exit from Tristram's show, the narrator Dora begins musing over her video-watching habits and the nostalgic old-movie obsession of the old aged. This teasing narrative style highly reminds me of the Simmelian seductress' strategy of faking an attention to minor props in the scenario of seduction in a pretended play performed uniquely for the seduced, to elicit his/her attention. In *WC* these flirty *reader-teasers* intensify the delightful narrative tension—that is completely missing from *PNE*'s narrative aborted/castrated by *reader nettlers*—, and guarantee the pleasure of the text via the Brooksian joyous *irritation of the plot*, this "complicated detour, the intentional deviance, in tension[...]a kind of arabesque or squiggle toward the end[...]the arbitrary, transgressive, gratuitous line of narrative" (Brooks 1984, 294).

The seductress's concurrent 'yes and no,' her invitation and rejection characterising the destabilizing game of flirtation also surface in the dynamics of Dora's narrative, that oscillates between an invitation to identification and a metafictional alienation. On the one hand, the readerly identification is encouraged by Dora's sustained first person autobiographical voice, the numerous secret intimate details given away by her confession (confidentially and flirtatiously informing readers about her favourite underwear, make-up and perfume), the vernacular oral style of her reminiscences, her conversationally familiar terms and colloquial tone inviting audience interaction, and addressing readers as if in a dialogue to take their part in her narrative resembling the stereotypically feminine small-talk, the communally weaved gossip or the tipsy bluffing. On the other hand, the recurring self-reflexive metatextual comments simultaneously disclose the tricks of the womanwriter's trade and the seductress' craft, and create a distance between the 'narrative-in-progress' and its receivers who witness its dynamic development, including its narrative gaps, overflows and "redirections which seem to evade Dora's control" (Gamble 1997, 171). As Sarah Gamble also claims, in *WC* readers are drawn "to contemplate the means by which the text is formulated, [and thus made] to doubt the entire process" (Gamble 1997, 171).

An authentic capricious seductress, Dora introduces herself as the sincerest chronicler of the Hazard's dynasty, an unbiased historiographer of her times, and a devoted adherent of the truth-telling Lejeuneian *autobiographical pact* (see Lejeune 2003). Nevertheless, her credibility is limited by the flaws in her memory, her reluctance to remember, her self-consciously feminist partial perspective, limited location, and situated knowledges (see Haraway 1988),[126] or her untamed fantasy urging her to substitute fact by fiction, inventing her own alternatives of history. Dora incarnates the serious researcher analysing her family's- and world-history with a scientific preciseness aiming at objectivity, helped by hypermodern technological aids of a word processor, filing cabinets and card indexes. Yet, she is also the old-fashioned "drunk[en old bag] in charge of a narrative," (158) telling her tall-tale by relying on Grandma's scrapbook, fusty showbiz reliquia and tabloid articles, as well as obsolete celebrity gossip and dubious rumours spread at local pubs. The allegedly objective, omniscient and the self-destabilizing, unreliable narratorial positions are roles which the actress-seductress-*narratress* Dora teasingly performs on their turn.

Dora's authentic autobiography deliberately undermines its trustworthiness fusing the serious chronicler's and the senile drunkard's voices. The cleverly composed, complicated Shakespearian plot—weaving together life- and love-stories of two quarrelling families containing five sets of twins!—is narrated in a text that remains draft-like, an unfinished

'memoir-in-progress,' constantly in the state of being (re)written and (de)composed of the (over)accumulated bits and pieces of various 'lightweight' texts borrowed from 'elsewhere' ((con)fusing fragments of trivial chit-chat, gossip, tipsy hoodwinking, fairy tale, urban legend, soap opera, dirty joke or numerous intertextual guest-texts of minor genres).

In a telling initial scene, Dora is working on her memoirs when suddenly her well-organized filing cards, her neatly assembled notes recording facts are covered with dirt and are blown topsy-turvy by a "wind that gets into the blood, that drives you wild" (3). The force of flirtation, the desire of the seductress and the desire to be seduced irresistibly overwhelm the narrative. In fact, *WC* teasingly lends itself to two opposing readings. The charming narrator either becomes too much involved, gets charmed herself, and thus, loses control of her text, or, on the contrary, achieves the flirtatious effect of her narrative by the subtly designed manoeuvres of her art of seduction.

Dora Chance appears as a seductress-storyteller-incarnate, a "conjurer baiting her audience" (Webb 1994, 297), a coquette septuagenarian (auto)biographer, shining with make-up, reeking of liquor, radiant with a mocking smile, who ravishes by her cunning "narrative performance" (Gamble 1997, 171). She recalls just as much as she forgets, she keeps some secrets to herself and tells some lies, she mis-remembers (68, 69), distorts (157), and corrects herself (158). She weaves her truth-telling-tall-tales, composes her 'most authentic' self-freaking, de-facing (auto)portraits and her (per)versions of the past (72), and re-creates her story that pleases her and teases her readers the most.

> But who she was or where they both were do not belong to the world of comedy. Perry told us of course, because we were family, but I don't propose to tell you, not now, when the barren heath was bloomed, the fire that was almost out sprung back to life and Nora a mother at last at seventy-five years old and all laughter, forgiveness, generosity, reconciliation.
> Yes.
> Hard to swallow, huh?
> Well, you might have known what you were about to let yourself in when you let Dora Chance in her ratty old fur and poster paint, her orange (Persian Melon) toenails sticking out of her snakeskin peep-toes, reeking of liquor, accost you in the Coach and Horses and let her tell you a tale.
> I've got a tale and half to tell, all right!
> But truthfully, these glorious pauses do, sometimes, occur in the discordant but complementary narratives of our lives and if you choose to stop the story there, at such a pause, and refuse to take it any further, then you can call it a happy ending. (227)

Dora's memoirs are much more governed by a selective, emotional memory (195) than by a strict, self-controlling attempt at the logical reconstruction of the objective past. Thus, when Dora recalls their father's denying them, she nostalgically recollects Peregrine gathering

her and Nora under his wing-like arms, doing a back-fling out of the window of their hostile father's dressing-room, and flying away, saving them (72)—then, emphatically underlining her unreliability she adds: "But I know I am imagining the back-flip and the flight" (72). Her exquisitely selective memory remembers "with a hallucinatory sensitivity" sense impressions:

> A hand on my breast, even if I cannot recall precisely whose hand. The taste of bacon sandwich back in the days when bacon in the pan buzzed like a bee in a lavender bush. The sensation of sunlight on the tender nape when we'd our hair cut for the first time. But it takes an effort to dredge up anything else, I can tell you. I couldn't for the life of me remember... (195)

Dora does not try to be sincere to Reality, but to her experience of reality. Sentimentally nostalgic and senility's forgetful reminiscences of passing subjective impressions, former and current delusive fantasies predominate over an objective description of the past. In the seductress' memoir, subjectivity prevails over objectivity, the essence seems to reside in the predominating details, forgetting masters remembering, distortion and invention replace reconstruction. Dora's autobiographical self is self-consciously fictionalized, made-up like the seductress' cosmetically stylized face, or the showbiz performer's self-made twinned selves. The 'rational glass' upheld by the traditional autobiography turns into the enchanted castles' distorting mirror that reflects past selves and scenes from one's former life as if they were grotesque picture postcards, or exaggerating, overplayed scenes from a burlesque movie. When the presumably tipsy, 75-years-old Dora looks back on the memorable triple wedding (Daisy-Melchior, Nora-Tony, (substitute)Dora-Genghis Khan) she participated at, punch-drunk, some fifty years ago, tomato juice on the bridal veil looks like real blood, while champagne corks blasting off in unison sound like machine-gun fire (158). With this, the narrator Dora underlines the postmodern tenet that there is no direct access to Reality, not only because she is always "drunk in charge of [her] narrative" (158), but also because reality is 'always already' inherently distorted through experience that is further distorted through its representation that is further distorted through the infinite series of its misreadings. Dora is aware of the inevitability of distortions in the perception of the real. Symbolically speaking, she knows that the water surface (symbolizing (mis)representation, (mis)interpretation) will inherently provide a crooked image of the object immersed into it, under its surface. Thus, the cunning narrator submerges a deformed object in the water in order to gain the clearest view of the object's sound, undistorted look. This way, Dora Chance's emphatically unreliable narrative, this delusive and drunken tall-tale abounded with excessively carnivalesque scenes, incredibly burlesque events and grotesque caricature-like characters becomes the most

authentic account of one's life, while the image of the self-freaking septuagenarian seductress emerges as the sincerest, the most trustworthy (self)portrait ever revealed.

Dora's story-telling ravishes by embracing the *trompe l'oeil* that, in Baudrillard's view, seduces by "remov[ing] a dimension from real space" (Baudrillard 1990, 28)[127] while adding a further, meta-dimension to this self-deforming space: her corporeal-, textual- performances are never a matter of *either-or*, but of *both-and*. Narration in *WC* funnily reminds me of a memorable popular icon of 'contained subversion,' the 'multi-dimensional, nude calendar cards' extremely popular in my childhood, in the censoring communist Hungary of the 1980s, showing attractive female nudes winking with the movement of the card, flirting with the centrally controlled subjects (regardless of their gender), promising them teasingly forbidden pleasures forever awaiting them in other dimensions. In Carter's novel, Dora enacts this winking seductress, who hides and reveals herself, who invites and rejects, and entices her readers to join her as she loses her way in history and her story. The narrative seduces by resembling the novel's *trompe l'oeil* spaces. On the one hand, the seductress-narrator's flirtatiously unreliable voice is like Grandma's boarding house: "it never look[s/sounds] *plausible*[...]like the stage set of a theatrical boarding house, as if Grandma had done it up to suit a role she'd chosen on purpose" (25). On the other hand, it takes the form of the set of a Hollywood Shakespeare-remake—directed by Peregrine, and starring Melchior Hazard, and also featuring Dora and Nora as Peablossom and Mustarseed—teasingly variously referred to in a kaleidoscopically changing set of titles as "*What You Will*" (87), "*What? You Will?*", "*What! You Will?*" (88), "*What! You Will!*" (89), "*What You Will!*" (90). Dora's enchanting narrative is like the forest of Arden's set looking "as a real wood[...]looking as if it was unreal and painted[...]an enchanted forest where you lose yourself and find yourself, again, the wood that changes you" (158). Dora traces de-re-facing (self-)portraits of her seductress faces and selves, she mingles temporal dimensions and lets her cyclical, fragmented, capricious stories distort *and* correct the objective view of conventional, linear History. In a telling initial scene, the Grandfather clock—a characteristic leitmotif of the Carterian oeuvre that usually halts to denounce Father Time—reappears. On the very morning of Dora's launching her memoirs, the non-functioning, "castrato Grandfather Clock," the Chance sisters' only inheritance from their father, shows the time right for the first time, to mark an epiphanic temporal zone's magical space, where Dora may narrate the Chances' and Hazards' 'more than one century long' family history within (the story of) one single day, speaking up in a tempting voice that resists, confuses and seduces History, Time, and even Death.

Dora's storytelling's seductiveness is enhanced by her narrative's flirtation with a multiplicity of genres she invokes only to reject, she invites only to make fun of. *WC* is one of Carter's most realist texts invested with a thorough critique of patriarchy, capitalism, colonialism, universalism, normativism, hegemony and all ideologies based on an aggressive, 'sacrificial' domination of *othereds*. Yet her (self-)contradictory stories tangled into each other consistently undermine their claims to realism (Gamble 1997, 169): the novel still overabounds with fantastic elements, which belong to the register of magic realism, even if they can be regarded as results of pure chance or lucky coincidences, 'perfectly normal abnormalities' of our everyday reality. Dora speaks from within the genre of *confession*, but subverts it by refusing to repent or to crave for the disciplinary self-correction prescribed by our *society of confession* (Foucault 1996, 22). Hers is a tall-tale-telling, teasing, self-fictionalizing anti-autobiographical *autobiography* (an *autobiografiction*), a *Bildungsroman* without a teleological personality-development, a *Künstlerroman* in which the emerging womanwriter renounces of organizing her scattered notes, of framing a homogenized imaginary self, of appropriating an authoritative authorial position. It is a *family romance* inoculated with travestied soap opera[128] and dirty joke, lacking the conventional 'boy-meets-girl plot' or the happy ending of marriage dictated by the normative heterosexual, reproductive economy. (In fact it resists conventional closure on the whole, and instead of any ending, proposes alternative endings, which mark new beginnings, new stories to come.) As Jeffrey Roessner highlights, the novel provides a feminist reinterpretation of *historiography*, by substituting the linear, progressive form of traditional, patriarchal narrative history with alternative histories. Her stories, personal reminiscences, unofficial accounts of domestic events, private peccadillos, or gossip bits are told from a multiply marginalized perspective. Instead of essentializing woman as a category of identity, identity is outlined as a conflictual terrain, while feminine subjectivity is explored in the very process of its social constitution. Readers are invited to ask *why* Dora performs the specific subjectivity, narrative, and corporeality she performs (Roessner 2002, 114-5). Her narrative oscillates between *tragedy and comedy*, as the Chance sisters 'make the most of it', turning their life into a carnival, a moveable feast, a spectacular freak show, while they are fully aware of the fact that the carnival is doomed to stop. Despite their traumatic losses, intertwined historical and personal tragedies—they are born, orphaned and abandoned during the First World War, and lose their foster-grandmother in the Second—the fatherless, (grand)motherless, childless, penniless, jobless narrator Dora nevertheless "refuses point blank to play in tragedy" (154), and "lets other pens dwell on guilt and misery" (163), knowing that "nothing is a matter of life and

death, except life and death" (215). "Hope for the best, and expect the worst" (154), a tragicomic line inherited from Grandma Chance summarizes the life-writer Dora's *ars poetica*, demonstrating the ambiguous quality, the '*allumeuse* tone' of her whole text.

7. Flirting with the Father, the Bard, and the Empire

The complex dynamics of flirtation's invitation and rejection is reflected in Dora Chance's ambiguous relation to her Father, Shakespeare and the British Empire—all simultaneously adored and despised throughout her narrative.

Already *WC*'s motto—an old saw saying "It's a wise child that knows its own father"—forecasts that the narrative is principally governed the desire for the Father. The urge to be acknowledged by the patriarchal authority refers to the illegitimate by-blow Chance twins' seeking the recognition of their biological father and their 'adoption' by the entire clan of the legitimate Hazards headed by the *pater familias*. It also implies the music hall girls' striving for their being accepted by the "authentic thespians" (Gamble 1997, 176) of their father's famous theatrical dynasty of the Shakespeare-acting Hazards. Nevertheless, a thorough reading reveals that, in fact, the narrative of wise children teasingly performs a ritual deconstruction of patriarchy, a rehearsal of the Oedipal scenario with a twist, a demythologization of biological fatherhood, a denigration of the *pater familias*, and a questioning of the Name of the Father. The proverb motto is continued with the reversed line "But wise the father who knows his own child" (73) to mockingly underline that in the novel's tangled web of family relationships paternity is permanently under dispute, suggesting that "'Father' is a hypothesis [only] 'mother' is fact" (223). The legitimate-illegitimate dichotomy is undermined, while the patriarch's privileged, central position as phallic key signifier, ultimate author/origin of the family saga is replaced by shifting, elusive, putative fatherly positions, which are blurring the family tree and constantly redefining kinship relations. Fatherhood instead of rigid, authoritative center, becomes a "movable feast" (216). Dora and Nora benefit from the fathering care of their Uncle Peregrine but are biological offspring of Melchior. Imogen and Saskia are brought up as darling daughters of the Lady Atalanta and Melchior but their true begetter is Peregrine. Tristram and Garreth are supposedly Melchior's children from his second marriage with Peregrine's former lover, Daisy Duck, but the boys suspiciously take after Peregrine, their very probable biological father. (Dora's memoirs do not fail to suggest ironically that even Melchior and Peregrine are very likely not descendants of Sir Ranulph Hazard but of a sideactor courting their mother. Moreover, Dora muses over the possibility whether her mother, Pretty Kitty has been on more

intimate terms with Peregrine as well.[129]) In *WC* fathers are cruel (like Ranulph), narcissistic (like Melchior), negligent (like Peregrine)[130], and overall elusive, "hypothetical, disputed, absent father" (227), yet they always provoke an Oedipal affection. However, as several critics highlight, the Oedipal plot is consistently reinvented as comedy (Tucker 1998, 17, Webb 1994, 285), as the classical Freudian Oedipal scenario is caricatured freakishly exaggerated and distorted. The yearning Dora hides her handsome father's photo, in ermine as Richard II, in a secret place in the back of her underwear drawer, and on first meeting Daddy she literally wets her panties ("I did piss myself when I saw him, in fact, but only a little bit, hardly enough to stain the sofa. (72)), and seeing their father for the first time is a red letter day because this is the first time the seven-years-old Chance sisters spend a penny, using a public convenience (57). Oedipal desire turns into the grotesque experience of Dora's funny first crush on daddy, where the myth of the sublimely unattainable figure of the father as a self-appointed royalty and a supreme signifier, is associated with lowly corporeal functions, defiling bodily fluids, abject entities of soiled underwear and dirty public toilets, which conventionally associated with contamination and pollution incompatible with subjectivity. When Melchior playing King Lear marries his stage daughter, he unwillingly provides a grotesque example for Oedipal affection, as by this act he imitates his father's marrying the Cordelia by his side as Lear, so that Melchior symbolically marries not only his daughter but his mother as well. An illustration of grotesque Oedipal hatred is when Saskia, unable to forgive her father marrying her best friend decades ago, bakes for her father's 100th birthday an enormous, chocolate frosted and poisoned cake in the shape of the Globe Theatre. The family chronicler Dora's conclusions about paternity are summarized both by a recurring Marilyn Monroe song refrain "...but my heart belongs to daddy" (228), and the nostalgically recalled comedian Gorgeous George's punchline in which a mother tells to her son worrying about all his potential girlfriends being illegitimate daughters of his father: "Don't worry, darlin', 'e's not your father!" (65, 213)—a punchline finally cracked by Dora to Saskia and Imogen at Melchior's birthday party. Both the biological[131] and cultural significance of fatherhood is refuted, and as the intense Oedipal affections fade, father appears as a "two-dimensional" illusion, a "papier-mâché head" with an "imitation look," a "larger than life but not lifelike" myth made up of a "collection of hopes and dreams and wishful thinking in the afternoons" (230). The nuclear family headed by the *pater familias* is replaced by Grandma's *invented family*, a matriarchal, caring alliance, where both Nora and Dora, adopting Garreth's baby-twins, may fulfil roles of both fathers and mothers. Yet, ironically, as Dora claims, even

these wise children will inescapably make up their own family romances, invent their own father figure that they will have to undermine on their turn.

The novel's other two mottos ("Brush up our Shakespeare." and "How many times Shakespeare draws fathers and daughters, never mothers and daughters.") invoke the ultimate literary forefather of all English writers, and make clear that *WC* is both an homage to and a subversive revisiting of the canonized Shakespeare-corpus and the literary masterfigure of the Bard. The novel is indubitably inspired by the trademark Shakespearean themes, actions, events and characters. The plot fuses the tragedies' *leitmotifs* of rivalry, betrayal, revenge, seduction, and incest with the comedies' characteristic tangled love lines, humorous misunderstandings, and happily ending final family reunions. Moreover, the novel—a composed of five act-like chapters and containing a "dramatis personae (in order of appearance)" at the end—features a whole series of King Lears, as well as numerous cross-dressing, confusing doubles (five sets of identical twins in the same family), many of them starring in the Hollywood remake of *Midsummer Night's Dream*, or frequently quoting a line form *The Merchant of Venice*: "It's a wise father that knows his own child".

The excessive overabundance of explicit and implicit intertextual allusions to Shakespeare, always accompanied by a mocking wink, already suggests that *WC* is not so much a humble, respectful, glorifying repetition of the successful Shakespearian scenarios but more of a parodic metatext on an iconic figure of the canon who is this time reappropriated vulgarized for subversive ends. In *WC*, Shakespeare is monopolized by the theatrical dynasty of Hazards, these "authentic thespians" (Gamble 1997, 176) who learn acting in The Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts, perform for monarchs, marry the elite, and self-evidently associate the name of Shakespeare with high culture, nobility, legitimacy, patriarchy, Britishness, imperialism and all the values incompatible with the "bastard [other(ed)] side," where they posit the popular vaudeville entertainer, illegitimate, working class Chance sisters, *against* whom they identify themselves. The Hazards' 'othering' identity politics—dichotomically defining the self in opposition to the sacrificially excluded, dominated difference of a 'lesser' other—is put in parallel with the process of canonization whereby the ideologically influenced literary institutions—instead of their asserted objective classification—violently incorporate a textual corpus to define it, conforming to pre-established, normative aesthetic standards, as valuable, high literature, standing in sharp contrast with the non-literary, invaluable, popular pieces (often locating 'masculine masterworks' *versus* 'women's literature'). *WC*, subverting domineering identity- and canon-

formations alike, perfectly illustrates just how far is Carter's Shakespeare from the fossilized, canonized, normative icon of patriarchal high culture, as she says:

> I do think there is something about Shakespeare that converts the most sophisticated person into a naïve observer[...]our greatest writer is the intellectual equivalent of bubble-gum, but can make twelve-year-old girls cry, can foment revolutions in Africa, can be translated into Japanese and leave not a dry eye in the house" (Sage 1992, 186)

As *WC*'s overall aim is to question hierarchies, blur rigid boundaries and defamiliarize naturalized, ready-made concepts, it also consistently reclaims the emblematic figure of high canon for popular culture, demythologizing and vulgarizing the Holy Bard, to "put him back on the side of the folk" (Gamble 1997, 177). The highbrow Hazards' solemn awe surrounding Shakespeare is continuously travestied. The fetishized family relic of Ranulph Hazard's golden crown from *King Lear*, a token of kingly authority turns out to be a sham, a cardboard crown made by Estella when the original was gambled away by its drunken owner. A bust sculpture of Shakespeare, specifically designed to bring earth from Stratford-upon-Avon for the sanctification of the Shakespeare-remake's Hollywood shooting-sight is used on the train journey by Daisy's cat as a 'kitty litter,' so that the soil desecrated by waste must be replaced by the Chance sisters with California soil from the Forest of Arden's set, "from the facsimile Elizabethan knot garden" (129). Ironically, these are the lowly Dora and Nora who live on Bard road and occupy the dressing room " 2b or not 2b" (90), whereas the last generation of the royal theatrical Hazards adapt distorted lines from Shakespeare in margarine advertisements, inviting "to butter or not to butter" (38). In Sarah Gamble's view, this "campification of Shakespeare" demonstrates that earlier objects of cultural value once enshrined in high culture may lose their ability to participate within the dominant aesthetic, and may also become (re)appropriable by contemporary, popular cultural forms. In Carter's scenario, *Midsummer Night's Dream,* a canonized 'high' play of Shakespeare is turned into *What You Will*!, a lightly entertaining, popular Hollywood remake that later becomes the research subject of PhD dissertations, and a cultural curiosity, a precious "anachronistic artefact" shown in sophisticated art cinemas. (Gamble 1997, 179) Carter's project of relativization discloses simultaneously the ductility of cultural products, the simulating, destabilizable nature of canon-formations, the hypocritical construction of identity, along with the cannibalism of British imperialism.

As Aidan Day asserts, *WC* is "about English culture...about the way in which English imperialism and patriarchy appropriated Shakespeare and cast him as a founding myth in their

own image" (Day 1998, 195). The rise of the house of Hazards reflects the glory days of British imperialism (Gamble 1997, 177). The theatre-troupe-leader Ranulph Hazard's "proselytising zeal[...]an imperative desire to spread and go on spreading the Word [of Shakespeare] overseas" (17) intertwined with his touring's Call to leave behind ravished towns all renaming themselves Hazard, and Melchior Hazard's dream to conquer the entirety of Hollywood with an iconic Shakespeare associated with his own name, mirror and mock the patriarchal England's imperialist occupation of territories across the globe in a colonizing incorporation that is disclosed in *WC* as aggressive, "hypocritical, loveless and irresponsible" (see Day 1998, 199).

The legitimate, patriarchal, imperialist image of Shakespeare idolized by Ranulph and Melchior Hazard as a determinator of British cultural supremacy, and exploited as a means for justifying the imperialist colonizing politics, is debased by the comedian Gorgeous George who ruthlessly parodies the sanctified myths of Shakespeare, the Empire and the Father alike. Gorgeous George literally embodies the freakish parody of the imperialist Britain when he performs a strip-tease, singing patriotic songs, marching around in military fashion, and ceremoniously exclaiming "Long live the King!" and "God bless the bloody British," while he displays on his tattooed torso the complete map of the world with the colonized British territories filled in brilliant pink ("although the limelight turned it into a morbid, raspberry colour that looked bad for his health" (67). Moreover, he reveals a gee-string "of very respectable dimensions," made of the Union Jack, as well as patriotic tableaux on his bare bottom (68) ("you could see the Cape of Good Hope situated in his navel and observe the Falkland Islands disappear down the crack of his bum when he did his grand patriotic ninety-degree rotation" (67). (As Pilar Cuder-Dominguez suggests, the irony on the decline of the British Empire is reinforced by the allusion to the Falkland Islands which awakens memories of the last imperialistic war fought by Thatcher's Britain against Argentina in the 1980s. (Cuder-Dominguez 2001, 14)) Gorgeous George enacts the decline of the British Empire (intertwined with the vulgarization of Shakespeare and the denigration of the Father) when from number one stand-up comedian, famed for his jokes on the uncertainty of paternity and for his tattooed bottom sporting the British conquests, he becomes a rather weak Shakespeare actor, tellingly impersonating Bottom in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and ends up as a senile street beggar, destroyed by time and liquor (with "the harsh light of the yellow streetlamps tak[ing] all the pink out of his continents" (197)), a tramp for whom Shakespeare is only a figure on the 20 £ note that allows him to drink to the health of England, Harry and St George, all "bloody bastards" (197). As Day claims, Carter reveals how aspects of Shakespeare can be

re-read and used as an alternative model for English cultural identity outside the inheritance of patriarchy and imperialism (Day 1998, 195), pointing towards much more popular, playful and pleasurable identity positions, propounded by Grandma's solidarity-based, caring, 'invented family' that embraces differences of sexuality, gender, race, class and age alike.[132]

8. Alluring Authorship: Bifocal Reconsiderations of the Names of the Authoress

As I have argued, the seductive quality of Dora's text is enhanced by her self-positioning as an unreliable narrator who performs cunning (capricious or carefully planned) narrative manipulations, by misremembering, carried away by emotions distorting, inventing alternative versions of history, relying on untrustworthy sources as gossip, and emphatically situating herself—her knowledge, experience and narrative (of (corpo)reality))—in the limited yet liberating location of the senile, sentimental, yet stunning swindler. Moreover, this unreliable narrator—as all narrators of Carter's trilogy—is spectacularly gendered, since Dora performs all the stereotypical *clichés* of feminine discourse. She embraces and exhibits every bit from the storehouse of ideologically feminized discursivity: her narrative is verbose, excursive, hyperbolic, histrionic, gossipy, emotive and fully flirtatious. Yet, the overwhelmingly seductive stylistic effect is reached via the ambiguity of this engendered narrative voice, enticing the reader's excited hesitation over its being either a wayward improvisation or a careful craft, either an authentic (identity's) voice or an artfully performed ventriloquy. The reader wonders about Dora's autobiographical discourse's being either the servile rehearsal of the ideologically prescribed script of femininity or a feminist, empowering self-freaking, somatized body-text. Dora's narrative does away with 'either-or' distinctions and instead introduces 'both-and.' While over-writing and revisioning herself as 'feminine,' 'female' and 'feminist' subject, she celebrates *a(-)woman*'s authorship via self-ironically enacting *both* of the stereotypically feminized 'authoressial' figures: the raging madwoman(writer) and her double, the silly, tender doll (lady novelist) alike. My proposition on the Carterian text's invitation to a *bifocal reading* seems to be explicitly reinforced here by the choice of the autobiographing, story-telling narrator's and her double's names. The names of the implied authoresses make easily recognizable intertextual allusions. On the one hand, the text invokes that infamous hysteric patient, Ida Bauer whom Freud names *Dora*, and who becomes an emblem of pathologized, abused female corporeality by being coerced in *his* case study on *her* to give birth to the male science of psychoanalysis—inaugurating concepts of the 'unconscious' or of 'psychosomatic disorders,' *her* body establishes *his* scientific authority—that will demonize, subordinate and silence her (speak instead of her, give meaning to her, re-

write her, 'tame her body into a text') forever. On the other hand, Ibsen's drama's *A Doll's House*'s heroine, *Nora* is invoked as the woman utterly subordinated, silenced, infantilized, devaluated by her husband who regards her a silly, sweet puppet—naming her *his* "little starling", his "squirrel,"—, desiring to close her eternally within the hyper-feminine (private, trivial, miniaturized, maternal) space of the doll-house, out of which he despises her loving care, and inhibits her attempts at autonomy. Dora consistently uses the first person plural personal pronoun in her narrative, embraces her twin-sister Nora within her self-/life-writing, and conceives a text starring, authored and fuelled by 'we.' This signals her insistence on her autobiografiction's *communal identity*, involving a doubled authorial position enriched by an inherent kaleidoscopic perspective's and a polyphonic voice's pleasures shared by twinned-narrator-heroines. Dora and Nora are twins not only in a biological but also in a metaphorical, symbolical sense. They embody the two opposing, ideologically prescribed femininity-stereotypes, which can be identified with the limited authorial positions available for women-writers within the patriarchal canon-constructions and interpretive conventions. *WC*'s communal womanly narration suggests that 'the incomprehensibly raging madwoman' (personified by Dora staging herself as a senile, over-sentimental, drunkard authoress) and 'the oft-silenced, splattering, silly doll' (impersonated by the amorous, hidden-voiced co-authoring Nora, I have associated with George Eliot's silly lady novelist) are in fact two sides of the same coin, not only because they represent simplifying *clichés* of subordinated femininity and devalued authoress-ship, but also since they enact subversions 'from within' the patriarchal convention-system to be subverted. Both of the invoked name-sakes 'turn their backs on men,' reject male domination, 'castrate phallic power' and introduce feminist empowerment by becoming writers of stories of their own. Dora—after having expressed her dis-ease in patriarchy via the 'coded' message of her hysterical symptoms' bodily inscriptions—dares to reject Freud's 'decoding' (of her) as a patriarchally and narcisisstically blinded, incompetent misreading furthering women's sexist manipulations (their exchange, objectification, pathologization). Dora interrupts Freud's reading (his violent meaning-imposition on her),[133] leaves the case study unfinished, walks out on the analyst, firing him up and turning him down like the real *allumeuse* (see Evans 1989, 78). Ibsen's Nora, on her turn—revolted by her husband's aggressive rejection of her 'feminine' *ethics of care* (Gilligan 1982, 68)[134] in favour of his supreme 'masculine' *ethics of justice* (the husband condemns Nora for her counterfeit she committed out of pure love to gain money to save *his* life)—decides to break out of the hypocrite, hierarchical, heterosexual institution of marriage, and flees the doll's house for good, realizing that her threatening female unruliness consists of her

patriarchally incomprehensible, unacceptable, unlimited love. Therefore, the narrator Dora and her double Nora embody twinned and twisted (sub)versions of the iconic authoress figures, to seemingly repeat their foremother, the winged storyteller Fevvers' conclusion. Namely, they highlight that womenwriters are always already (ideologically) interpellated and interpreted into the 'lesser' authorial positions prescribed to them by the patriarchal canon that insists on the incompatibility of femininity and 'serious' authorship, and on the significance of the author's sex in pre/over-determining the quality of the text (—inherently feminized as incomprehensibly-insanely drive-driven or insignificantly sentimental, as 'madwomanwriter' or 'silly lady novelist').[135] *Yet*, they also believe in internally troubling this 'female literary tradition' via spectacularly fulfiling the canonically marginalized, devalued, feminized author(ess)ial position in order to provide an ironic metatext of it('s limiting production and prescriptions), while reinforcing the sisterly solidarity with literary foremothers. The reiterative-revisionary narrative is simultaneously a tribute to all women writing with bounded hands, without a room, without a name of their own, and a redirection towards new ways of women's self-representations as empoweringly re-embodied authoresses calling to life a 'non-othering,' willingly self-freaking readership ready to enjoy and co-author (women)writers on their own rights. The 'recycling' of Freud's Dora's and Ibsen's Nora's names underlines the Carterian text's *bifocal perspective*'s potentials of being read as a 'feminine' repetition *and* a 'feminist' re-examination of women's (literary) tradition and traditional woman(hood) alike.

Being immediately linked with bifocal and even kaleidoscopically plural perspectives (granted by extra, metatextual layers), the name(s) of the intra-textual authoress(es) have nothing to do with the Foucauldian *Name of the Author* that stands as a limit to the proliferation of meaning, as a guarantee of unity, identity and canonical value (Foucault 1984). Here, the name of the authoress in the text does not mark a propriety, an authority over the text produced, nor is it a token of Truth or a sign of intellectual triumph. Instead Dora repeatedly stresses her unreliability, her identification with fictional personas rather than a 'real' authoritative author, her desire to seduce her readers into her text full of secrets invented to be shared, her urge to conceive her body-text via de/re-constructive mis-re-memberings. The authoress' name is not inherited from, imposed upon by the Father, but is invented by the foster-Grandmother: it does not regulate as a title the compulsory continuation of a patriarchally, ideologically prescribed (his)story, but rather fosters playfulness, chance pleasures of open-/multiply-ended (her)stories of de-facing heroines, who double each other in the role of the self-freaking authoress, supported by grotesque co-narrators, intervening in the text on carnivalesque ocassions of narrative slips, to which I shall turn to now.

9. Narrative Slips: Gaping Garments and Feminist Epistemology

Dora's literacy, her becoming an author(ess) is an achievement of her seductiveness exercised in the heterosexual regime of desire (yet pointing beyond it). Ironically her feminist feminine text is indebted to and inspired by men. Firstly, her major motivating intertexts are those of the English literature's father, Shakespeare. Secondly, she weaves her teasing tall-tales mainly to seduce men: to win her biological father's love and acceptance, to ravish her beloved father-substitute Uncle Perry (by arousing and satisfying his narcissistic drives with a carnivalesque text that matches his conjurer, trickster, vagabond self), and to sweep off their feet all men whom she wishes to drag into her bed. Thirdly, her knowledge of *belles lettres* 'originates' from the 'poor old poet' Irish Ross O'Flaherty, called "the Chekhov of Southern California" (120) (because of his vodka-drinking and melancholy), who fatally overwhelmed by Dora's charms, yet, short of money, unable to buy her diamonds or a mink, gives her Culture, an overall introduction to literature from A for Austin to W for Whitman. Yet, Dora's internally subversive narrative is far from being phallogocentric, it features a *queered* Shakespeare, a "papier-mâché father," a forever absent, unreliable Perry, while the rebellious muse nostalgically recalls her master, Irish to criticize, mock, and overcome him. (Her dedicated copy of his *opus magnum*, *Hollywood Elegies* ("a poisonous gift", "inscribed to his 'gilded fly'") is sold to pay her electricity bills (152). His over-sentimental poetic figures like "insincere sunlight" are rendered ridiculous (121). His name is easily recalled as that of a "difficult customer" (120). His memory surfaces most prominently on occasions of lowly corporeal functionings such as drunken belching or vomiting (154). He is commemorated ironically as the male artist who attempts to "harass the muse,"[136] but instead of silencing and exploiting her, contributes to the emergence of her own text in which she can overwrite him at her will. In Dora's words, "if it hadn't been for poor old Irish and his philanthropic passion for the education of chorus girls, I'd not been sitting here, now, writing this. He taught me one end of a pen from the other. He gave me the confidence to use the word 'philanthropic'. In return, I broke his heart. Fair exchange is no robbery." (13) "I gave him all a girl can give—a little pleasure, a little pain, a carillon of laughter, a kerchief full of tears. And, as for him, well, it was he who gave me the ability to compose such a sentence as that last one." (119)) Despite its liability to these father figures, Dora's narrative constantly pokes fun of them, flirting with the Bard, her Father, her masters, the arch-author, and remains a *par excellence* 'women's writing' fuelled by female freaks. Besides the *allumeuse* hysteric Dora and her double, identical twin, silly Nora, the lecherous, carnivalesque comedienne grandmother

Estella, and the invented-family-founding, over-decorated, gossipy foster-grandma Chance 'lend' their embodied voices and cacophonic, freakish corporealities to the narrative to underlie Dora's comic text, and surface in the narrative slippages, gaps or overflows. Supplementing her voice, they intensify the narrative's polyphonic pleasures, the unreliable, unlocatable narrator's flirtatious flickering, as well as the overall seductive quality of the text, combining the carnivalesque excess,' the corporeally unrepressed female freak's erotic tension, and the conventionally othereds' community's loving care based on solidarity.

The *narrative slips* I would like to turn now would be called in narratological terms a shift from *extradiegetic* to *intradiegetic* narration. Yet, characteristically in Carter, these slips, devoid of a transitory line, which could explicitly introduce another embedded narrator into the text, are closer to slips, sudden surprises. They take even the narrator Dora by surprise, as her story—the only sustained autobiographical narrative of Carter's fiction—seems to continue itself uninterrupted even in her, the autobiographer Dora's absence, the narrative seems to breathe by itself. Her text weaves itself almost regardless of her, as it is decomposed by beloved co-narrators, sharing her self-freaking, othered body, and joining, supplementing her somatized narrative on corporeally motivated, carnivalesque occasions, while reinforcing the communal, polyphonic, heterogenous aspect of the text.

Before concentrating on the narrative slippages, related to three memorable, carnivalesque grotesque occasions, whereby Dora's voice is supplemented by the embodied voice, somatized text or corporeally-induced narrative of female freaks who fuel Dora's reminiscences, and play a vital role in the constitution of herself and her autobiografiction (as self-freaking body-text), I associate these slips in the narrative with two metaphors, which might highlight their significance in the text of the feminist grotesque seductress.

Firstly, the narrative slips can be associated with the *gaping garment*, specifically as described by Roland Barthes' *Pleasure of the Text* (1975). Dora is a loquacious narrator, who tells a lot, even too much about her self, her body and her text alike, as her autobiografiction's *leitmotif*, protagonist, director, vital identity-marker and text-generating engine is her performative, spectacularized, seducingly freakish *body*, self-defined in its relationality with 'similarly differing' bodies whose sustained over-verbalization, over-writing—in all meanings of the word—characterizes the text. On three ecstatic, epiphanic occasions, the body's hyper-semioticization is boosted, exalted to such a tension, that the narrative voice, excited by its own narrative re-membering, seems to run out of breath. Someone else is allowed to enter into her (text), to take her (place), to speak (instead of) her. The text weaved by her does not cover, hide her anymore, but slowly slips off her shoulders, allows the garment to gape, and

uncovers her flesh. At these orgasmic, festive or moribund moments, the real somatization of the text begins, substituting or rather supplementing the semioticization of the body, and enhancing the seductiveness of Dora's 'strip-teasing body-text'. In Barthes' words:

> Is not the most erotic portion of the body where the garment gapes? ...it is intermittence...which is erotic: the intermittence of skin flashing between two articles of clothing (trousers and sweater), between two edges (the open-necked shirt, the glove and the sleeve), it is this flash itself which seduces, or rather: the staging of an appearance-as-disappearance....In these cases there is no tear, no edges: a gradual unveiling: the entire excitation that takes refuge in the hope of seeing the sexual organ (schoolboy's dream) or in knowing the end of the story (novelistic satisfaction). (Barthes 1975, 9-10)

The voices overtaking Dora's can only be people's who can share her intra- and trans-textual ecstasy, who prove to be pro-, co-creators, inspirators of her (body-)text, who—like her—guess yet refuse (to tell the) ending (of) her story, who help to highlight the enticing complexities of her art of seduction, of her craft of enchantment both on narrative-, corporeal-, and identity-political-levels. Firstly, when Dora makes love with Uncle Perry, Nora takes over the narration, so that Dora can fully enjoy her orgasm. Then, Perry intervenes as a narrator to let Dora 'enter into a cathartic, celebratory, carnivalesque dance' with her paternal grandmother Estella whose voice, prevailing over Perry's, turns out to be the main resonator of the text in this second epiphanic moment. Then, thirdly, Grandma Chance speaks up as a narrator through her scattered clothes re-collecting, re-membering, re-fragmenting her and her daughters' bodies, as a *memento mori* and a *memento vitae*, pointing beyond ephemeral, earthly seductions. (These are the points of intensities, the narrative slips on which I will concentrate in my next parts.) The textualization of the body by someone else (Nora, (Perry) Estella, Grandma Chance), who is an *other*, carnivalesque, grotesque, freak, like her self (Dora), (and who is also someone beloved) coincides with the unspeakable, transverbal corporeal presence/absence of Dora, the non-narrating narrator. Throughout these narrative slips, her jouissant, celebratory, moribund body is present in its absence and absent in its presence in the text. Someone else stands in for her, occupying her place as the 'reminiscent, (self)life-writing, embodied narrator-subject-in-speech.' Therefore, she does not have to remember, she can merely live for the given present moment, she can freely thrill, suffer, enjoy herself, and joyously *forget*. In these few, privileged moments, re-membering really signifies for Dora resurrecting the body, re-*membering* and re-fragmenting it, (re)living corporeal experiences in their full intensity (going beyond representing them), be they current, immediately present bodily pleasures (lovemaking with Perry on their shared birthday),

atavistic, inherited corporeal sensations (joining the carnivalesque dance with grandmother Estella, in her youth, in the past century), or envisioned future physical events to come (illumination with Grandma Chance on the interconnection of death-oriented-, death-denying-life and life-sanctifying death, a revelation presumably determining the rest of their lives). Dora's is a seducing text since in it the autobiogra(fictionaliz)er is not always obliged to sincerely recollect her authentic past, but—besides frequently leaving her notes scattered, dismembering her autobiographical corpus, inventively misremembering, and flirtatiously highlighting her forgetfulness—she can occasionally *forget her self* on the whole.[137] She can dwell in forgetfulness, remain silent or incomprehensible, and instead of narrating, (mis)representing (her life, social identity, moral sense, and her culturally embodied, self-disciplining subjectivity), she can simply relive, live (her nomadic corporeal realities and the affirmation of life (even in death)). She can revel in corporeality, unbounded by the ties of resentment, nostalgia or memory, and let others do their share of misremembering. These ecstatic moments decipherable in narrative slips illuminate how in Dora's enchanting autobiografiction, forgetting is entwined with remembering (in fact, forgetting here equals re-membering), how the loss, excess, or forgetting of one's self is embedded within (self)life-writing, and how presence is integrated within absence, or how absence disrupts the presence from within. The narrator, Dora once again embodies the seductress: she is not where she is and she is where she is not. Her narrative's slips—either 'stumbles' or a 'strategy' on the part of the seductress—like gaping garments of the text entice with disclosing or at least letting a peep into/at her sex/text, at the end of her (story). But instead of doing so, they merely make revelations, which excite by suggesting the text's 'essence,' while keeping it an 'enigma,' insolvable by nature.

Secondly, others' mis-rememberings disrupting the self-writing, the narrative of oneself lead towards a *feminist epistemology* based on fragmentation, incompletion, and a plurality of perspectives, which characterize Dora's narrative and irritate patriarchal logic by refusing unity, homogeneity, or the singularity of truth. Dora's textualized transverbal moments evoke feminist epistemology in so far as they emphasize the significance of emotions and communities in knowing, in the formation of knowledge. The seductions of the recalled moments—not recaptured but left fleeting—involve many more than the explicitly targeted persons (like Uncle Perry seduced by Dora in the lovemaking birthday scene). Instead, they reveal seductions' absolutely non-predatory, non-possessive, non-sexed potentials which induce communal joys to be shared by the intruding/invited (guest-)narrators (Nora, (Perry) Estella, Grandma Chance), the presently absent, tellingly silent (heroine-)narrator (Dora), and

the absently present readers (you, me, us), who, all conjointly seduced, take/contribute their share in/to *metaphysical erotics* of embracing the whole world (Simmel 1996, 124), via the *joie de vivre*, the ravishment of death, or the pleasure of the text itself. Dora knows and forgets her self via a feminist, gendered, re-embodied epistemology, whereby the world is experienced through the body, insight comes by partial and plural perspectives, one is enabled by a situated and responsible, caring, solidarity-based relativity. As I have already mentioned, Dora Chance resembles Freud's hysteric, since she occasionally 'walks out of her text,' leaves her 'case-study'—her notes of a madwoman or memoirs of a senile seductress—contradictory, fragmented, unfinished, inviting disruption, ambiguity and cacophony. Yet, in the guise of the rebellious illegitimate daughter, she traces the portrait of the womanwriter with a voice of her own, who refuses to be framed within any simplifying meanings, but invites communal authorship and pleasures. In her text, she settles accounts with her biological and literary father(s) by gently seducing them to subvert his-stories from within, and embraces her naming foster-mothers (Grandma Chance and Estella Hazard) and unnamed literary foremothers (of all marginalized women's writings) by re-writing them in a celebratory homage with a bifocal perspective, and by even occasionally ceding them the narratorial role, and by always sharing with them a *feminist epistemology* (see Haraway, Moi 1990)[138] that allows for them, women to remain simultaneously embodied, empowered and enigmatic. The seductress Dora's story becomes an occasion for a feminist epistemology coinciding with Nancy Hartsock's *standpoint epistemology* described by Sidonie Smith as an analysis of "specific confluences of social, psychological, economic and political forces of oppression," an affirmation of new, alternative knowledge located in the experience of the margins, an exposition of the falseness of the universalizing "view from the top," and a celebration of plural, othered, marginalized perspectives "not as subjugated or disruptive knowledges, but as primary and constitutive of a different world" (Smith 1993, 159).

i. "Smash, bang, clatter, and [...]fuck the house down": Dora and Uncle Perry's Lovemaking in Nora's Voice

The most obvious narrative slip—that I will analyse first, but that in the narrative's chronology comes as the last one—is where the narrator Dora, excited by her own re-memberings runs out of breath, abandons her narratorial role, and lets her twin-sister Nora into her text to do her share of textualization of bodies. In the meanwhile, Dora—the non-narrating narrator, exhaustively existing by exiting her semioticization and 'coming' in her somatization—can submerge in corporeal presence and ecstatic absence, fully enjoying her orgasm with Uncle Perry. During (one of) the novel's final carnivalesque grotesque scene(s)

—that perfectly suits what Lorna Sage refers to as those trademark Carterian "orgasmic finales" (Sage 1994a)—the 75-years-old, stiletto-heeled, mini-skirted, excessively made-up, senior seductress Dora momentarily escapes from her (regained and demystified) Father's centennial birthday party, and runs off with her father's brother, her substitute father, the 100-years-old but still charming, robust, red-haired and vigorous trickster, Uncle Perry to celebrate in a carnivalesque fashion their shared birthday by making love upstage, in the attic so apt for the madwoman, in the theatrical space of the father's bedroom letting "all the dirty secrets hidden in the cupboards [...] come out at last, [...]come to fuck in his bed" (219), while the rest of the family continues the anniversary festivities downstairs. Dora's account of their lovemaking is virtually disrupted, her *jouissance* gradually breaks her sentence down, increasingly shattering her text, until her peaking bodily pleasure is marked by a *narratio interruptus*—instead of a *coitus interruptus*—as she 'comes' (in/to her body-text) somatizing the narrative with her corporeally present absence, letting her garment gape, presenting her unrepresentable flesh, while her double, the other female grotesque, Nora overtakes the storytelling, at least until her sister is beside herself.

> *Not bad for a centenarian.*
> *Not bad at all.*
> *Not bad. Not—*
> *Nora told me afterwards* how the agitations of the steel bed began to make the chandelier downstairs directly beneath it, shiver, so that the music of the lutes, now plucking away at a selection of show tunes for the delight of dancing guests, was almost imperceptibly augmented by the tinkle, tinkle, tinkle of all the little lustres as the tiers of glass began to sway from side to side, slopping hot wax on the dancers below, first slowly, then with a more and more determined rhythm until they shook like Josephine baker's bottom—
> 'What a clatter!' *said Nora.* 'Like cymbals, darling. Don't you think I didn't guess what you were up to?'
> There was just one ecstatic moment, *she opined,* when *she thought* the grand bouncing on the bed upstairs—remember Perry was a big man—would bring down that chandelier and all its candles, smash, bang, clatter, and the swagged ceiling, too, bring the house down, fuck the house down, come ('cum?') all over the posh frocks and the monkey jackets and the poisoned cake and the lovers, mothers, sisters, shatter the lenses that turned our lives into peepshows, scatter little candle-flames like an epiphany on every head, cover over all the family, the friends, the camera crews, with plaster dust and come and fire.
> But such was not to be. There are limits to the power of laughter and though I may hint at them form time to time, I do not propose to step over them.
> *Perry and I had no idea what was going on below, of course.*
> *Not bad for a centenarian at all, at all."* (220, *emphasis mine*)

In the novel otherwise characterized by the over-verbalization of the body (as token of identity, and engine of text) here, suddenly, the body is emphatically and ecstatically, ob-scenely present in its absence. The stand-in narrator Nora cannot actually see anything of

Dora's and Perry's lovemaking upstairs, and can only describe its tangible effects on the party downstairs, while the 'real' narrator Dora, to whom this autobiografictional grotesque body-text actually belongs to, is unable to speak, absent, beyond her self, absent-minded, yet/only corporeally fully present. Thus, instead of being explicitly textualized, the body is only palpable in the vibration, the pulsation, the throbbing of text. The stand-in narrator Nora's kitsch voice over-writing the body's absence, and the absent narrator Dora's hysteric 'body-talk' intertwine to provoke intense, double pleasures, ambiguous twin voices, speaking from both up and down(stairs), here and beyond, absence and presence, through body, text, and silence alike. Dora's irrepresentable orgasmic body somatizes, 'corporeally infects' the text by triggering a vocal embodiment, generating the stand-in narrator Nora's embodied voice, whereby she instead of *re-presenting* stresses the continuous *presence* of the other seductress' body through all the "tinkle, tinkle, tinkle" and "smash, bang, clatter" (220), trans-verbal, non-signifying, ob-scene noises produced, provoked by the entangled, excited bodies.

I find it noteworthy that although Dora makes love, experiences orgasm with Uncle Perry, she shares the joys of communal narration, the pleasure of the text with her sister, Nora, who comes in her place in the text as a narrator. This seems to suggest that, as I have already claimed, Dora's seductions point way beyond heterosexual (not to mention the heteronormative reproductive) scenarios of sexuality, and even point beyond the repressed lesbian desires (of the text, and of its author(s), Dora and Carter alike). More significantly, what gains emphasis here is that these are two multiply marginalized, usually silenced or mis-represented, doubled female (feminist) grotesque figures who communally fulfil the narratorial position in a polyphonic text that enables them to resist discursive technologies of power, and to reject the silence or the self-correcting confession conventionally assigned to them. (This displacement, dissemination or proliferation of seductions and pleasures reoccurs repeatedly. In an other narrative slip the carnivalesque Uncle Perry's stand-in narration is swept away by Estella's celebratory dance inviting everyone to join in, while on the third narrative slip's occasion the Chance sisters prepare to dress to seduce their Father only to be reminded by their scattered and recollected clothes embodying their past-selves that it is Grandma's loving care which actually fuels their lives, texts, bodies and selves.)

The ecstatic corporeal presence supplementing conventional representation is intensified by the narrative's temporality, the chronological positioning of the very act of (self)-life-writing. As this narrative slip is located towards the end of Dora's narrative, it can be associated with what I have referred to as *epiphanic autobiographical moment*. For me, the epiphanic autobiographical moment signifies the end of the story, the chronological terminus

of the narrated life *and* also indicates the birth of the autobiographer, of the already self-reflexive and meta-text-producing 'writer of the self' at the commencement of writing, the starting-point from where the actual retrospective autobiographical narration begins. Characteristically, in the carnivalesque Carterian text, this autobiographical moment—the end of the story, and the narrative point of departure, the authoress' coming-to-text—is not only always marked by the self-freaked grotesque and feminist empowered body—Fevvers' laughing body, Eve/lyn's decomposing body, Dora's seducing body—but it is also paradoxically multiplied. Dora's love-making with Uncle Perry can be considered just as much an epiphanic autobiographical moment as Dora's remembering induced by her scattered-recollected clothes jumping out from Grandma's cupboard, or the virtually final scene of the twin seductress hags, tipsy and jolly mothers and fathers of their newly adopted Hazard-Chance babies, disappearing with their baby carriage, singing in the moonlit streets, walking towards coming new stories of wise children (—scenes quite close to each other, situated on pages 220, 190, 231). Thus, ironically, autobiography (autobiografiction), a genre incompatible with the recollection of one's own death, challenges, surpasses, and even seduces death by multiply staging it, by inventing plural endings, which in the end all refuse to be endings, and instead provide alternative conclusions or initiate new stories to come. In a way, the orgasmic finale of the septuagenarian and centenarian relatives' freakish grotesque, joyously tangled bodies in bed also stages death, that lively small death embedded within life, of the sexual ecstasy Georges Bataille calls the erotic, mystical, deathly sovereign interior experience of *la petite mort* (Bataille 1995). Moreover, via a chronological chaos, death or the end is summoned to superseded. Firstly, Dora locates herself as autobiogra(fictionaliz)er writing her text at the beginning of her narrative, on the morning of her 75th birthday, describing herself sitting in her home, at her computer surrounded by scattered notes, photos, newspaper-cuttings and Grandma's scrapbook, composing her reminiscences. Yet all the aforementioned events happen on the night of her birthday, passing beyond or ahead of the moment of writing. Secondly, they seem to attempt to seducingly stretch presence, the ecstatic present moment for good (as illustrated by Dora's self-disrupting lines). And thirdly, they all promise new exciting future stories, which, be they authored by her or others, are all 'rooted' in her text, and thus, shall commemorate her, re-member her body, continue her story, keep her in body-text. This is the reason why the grotesque seductress womanwriter, Dora, at the end of her autobiografiction taking place under sign of seduction, defacement, and death, can so comfortably and mockingly claim: "Here, Nora [...] we can't afford to die" (230).

ii. "Come on![...]Join in!": The Grandmother's Carnivalesque Dance in Perry's Voice Embraced by Estella's Voice

The next narrative slip I shall examine already destabilizes the traditionally retrospective autobiographical narrative by implying a temporal confusion. As regards the story-telling's temporal sequence it is the first narrative slip disrupting Dora's reminiscences (as early as on page 18). Yet, as regards the historical chronology of the personally influential family history, this is an archaic, 'inherited' memory dating back to around the turn-of-the-century, before Dora's birth, a memory perhaps multiply distorted via repeated re-narrations, yet of a strange atavistic significance, and of a memorable vitality, of a quality of constant presence.

As I have already mentioned, despite its sisterly solidarity, its homage to literary foremothers and feminist qualities, Dora's narrative is also indebted to male artists, most prominently embodied by Shakespeare (progenitor of her main intertexts) and Irish (her educator in *belles lettres*) whom she salutes flirtatiously in a mock-honourable narrative. Yet, the invocation of an inspirational male takes an even more explicit and suspectably ironic form in the references to Uncle Perry. Even Irish is only the double of Perry. It is Perry who introduces to Dora his friend, Irish, whom she immediately associates with her Uncle in an identification with a sexual connotation, first describing Irish as "only just past forty, neck and neck with my wicked uncle, who at that very moment was giving Daisy what she always said was the best time she ever had" (119), and then recurrently connects Irish to Perry. Indeed, Perry, like Irish constitutes a motor, a major reference point of Dora's narration. His attractivity is augmented by multiple factors. He is the first man—and a handsome young man indeed: "broad of shoulder, heavy of thigh, with his unruly thatch of burnished copper hair, the lavish spattering of freckles across his nose, laughing green eyes flecked with gold" (30) —to enter Grandma Chance's matriarchal household. He becomes the sisters' substitute-father overtaking the paternal responsibilities (financial support or tender fostering) his brother denies from his illegitimate offspring. He is presumably Dora's first and last sexual partner, a juvenile fling and a geriatric passion in one, to whom all her other lovers are compared. Beyond his boyish sex-appeal and fatherly comforting tenderness, he is the one who awakens the Chance children's passion for song, dance and vaudeville performance by presenting them with a miniature toy theatre, and a phonograph and a Bakelite disk with the song "I can't give anything but love, baby" (33). This song from Perry becomes the sisters' hymn to love and life, and an *ars poetica* of the seductress' memoir that constitutes a narrative moved by metaphysical erotics, fusing self-freaking corporeal and textual performance.

Moreover, Perry's ravishing personality exercises a definitive influence on Dora, as he enacts the male equivalent of the seductress she fashions herself to be by fulfilling *all* the traditional engendered roles—of father, lover, seducer, mentor, friend, master, role-model—while he also denies, challenges all of them as limiting subject positions insufficient to define his heterogeneous identity. For "Peregrine Hazard, adventurer, magician, seducer, explorer, scriptwriter, rich man, poor man—but never either beggarman or thief" (18), this "bloody marvellous conjurer" (62), "here today, gone tomorrow, not so much of a man, more of a travelling carnival" (169) is the very embodiment of the carnivalesque grotesque celebratory spirit. He is a restless man who loves change, fornication, trouble (20), who is an expert in juggling and conjuring tricks, who is fond of travelling, getting lost and at misguiding others, whose presence in never forgotten sweetened by his regular gift of Fuller's walnut cake, loudened by the laughter of his dirty jokes, musicalized by his vaudeville songs, accompanied by a flood of butterflies collected by himself in the jungle. Perry is characterised by a carnivalized spectacularity that will become the major marker of Dora's narrative, identity and body alike: "laughter like sweet thunder blew on the wind in front of him and every head turned to see whom it might be, arriving later, in such a genial tempest" (206). If the senile seductress, identical twin, tall-tale-telling narrator Dora enacts the feminist self-freaked version of the female grotesque, Perry personifies the empowered male grotesque with his spiky, "bright, offensive, bad-boy red hair" (114), size of a polar bear, size of a warehouse (62, 114), with a magician's dove in his pocket and an urge to make everyone happy (31), always shaken by laughter or a delighted little quiver playing around his lips (30), an unforgettable lover even at 100, with an atmosphere of indestructibility (102) and an enormous merriment, "full of bounce and bonhomie" (170), always dressed, as if in costumes, changing in a weathered flying jacket of US Flying Corps, a gigolo's vanilla ice-cream suit, or a cowboy-costume of the sheriff of the county of Hazard.

Even more significantly, Perry's carnivalesque narrative strategies (de/reconstructing his grotesque, trickster persona), his seducing-conjuring ways of flirtatious, forgetful reminiscences (remembering always the good times in memories full of laughter and dancing (18)), and his self-fictionalizing story-telling ("offering a Chinese banquet of options to what happened to him next. He gave us all his histories, we could chose which ones we wanted—but they kept on changing, so" (31)) are re-enacted by/in Dora's mockingly mis-remembering and self-freaking autobiografictional narrative.

Therefore, the seductress applies an ironic tactic by trying to arouse the desired, 'targeted' Perry's excitement through mimicking, reflecting, restaging his carnivalesque

identity in her carnivalesque narrative, and thus, providing a mirror to him, promising the gratification of his narcissistic drives. (Though, rather delusively, since hers is an ironically distorting mirror, and, in a radical feminist way, it may even aim to reveal the short-sightedness, the Irigarayian *hommo-sexuality* (Irigaray 1993, 119) of male desires underlying patriarchy's functioning). It is Dora's mimic, mocking mirroring of Perry, this desire to please, the longing to connect with the (idealized or travestied, but certainly beloved) target of her seduction via a stylistic identification with him, which allows Perry to intervene into the septuagenarian seductress' narrative. He can take over the narratorial voice in reconstructing her past, her family history, her inherited memories, and atavistic sensations while recalling, inviting into the text Perry's mother, Dora's paternal grandmother, the joyously unruly actress, the beautiful and grotesque Estella, whom Dora ironically calls "the one fix point in our entire genealogy" (12).

> Our Uncle Peregrine was his mother's boy.
> We were hurrying down the street, he told me, on tour in Australia. It was in Sidney, down by the Circular Quay. We were on our way to some ladies' lunch club—she did guest appearances, it helped with the finances, Ranulph was chronically short of bob. We were late of course, because she hadn't been able to find a clean frock but after much rummaging came up with one with only a couple of little wine stains and smear of marmalade so she pinned a bunch of frangipani over the worst of it and got her hair up, somehow...We came to an organgrinder, we stopped to admire the monkey. She gave the organgrinder six pence, and he played 'Daisy, daisy'. She took my hand and we danced, right there, on the pavement. Her hairpins scattered everywhere. My celluloid collar burst in two. The monkey clapped its paws together. Everybody stared. *'Come on!' she said to the world in general. 'Join in!' Then everybody started dancing, they all took hold of the hand of the next perfect stranger. 'I'm half crazy, all for the love of you.' She looked upon what she had accomplished and was glad*[....]*She made them happy.* There was mango ice-cream for dessert, our favourite. We had three bowlfuls each. In Melbourne, they named a sundae after her, 'Ice-cream Estella', a mango ice-cream topped with passionfruit purée. If ever we get to Melbourne, together, Floradora, I'll treat you to an 'Ice-cream Estella'.
> Always the lucky one, our Peregrine, even in his memories, which were full of laughter and dancing, he always remembered the good times. (18) (*emphasis mine*)

Paradoxically, the only occasion on which Uncle Perry is allowed to intervene into Dora's storytelling partly reinforces, but mostly destabilizes his position as the primal progenitor of the seductress narrative. His narrative intervention starts out with the first person plural 'we,' a personal pronoun that also predominates in Dora's autobiografictional construction of a communal identity. Yet, his voice is quickly complemented and taken over, overwhelmed by the subject of his intervention, Estella, his mother, Dora's paternal grandmother. Estella suddenly speaks up in a voice of her own that invites everyone to join in her dance, and illuminates her ribald self as the very origin of Dora's carnivalesque grotesque

corporeally motivated, joyous and caring, coquettish textual performance. As we learn later on from Dora's recollection of family anecdotes, Estella-A-Star-Danced Hazard was a distinguished belle of her times, with a gift for making men happy and for leaving them (19), and an ingenious actress, who could even convincingly enact the Prince of Denmark cross-dressed and pregnant. In a minor yet crucial episode of Dora's memoir, she appears with her gorgeous red "hair always coming undone, [....]tumbling down her back, spraying hairpins out in all directions, her stockings at half-mast, her petticoat[....]adrift in the middle of the street, her drawers[....]droopin", her slipper's heel broken, a marvel and a mess, who "could break your heart with one single sob and[...]gets the giggles, sometimes, in the middle of some big scene," and who invites everyone to join the dance and merriment in the spontaneous carnival incited by her (12, 18). Here, she seems to become a perfect personification of Lady Carnival, the mistress of all celebrations. Apparently, Uncle Perry's carnivalesque character is just as much an inheritance from Estella, as Dora's aptitude for seduction, performance, caring and shared joys. Even Estella's song 'I'm half crazy, all for the love of you' foreshows Dora and Nora's song "I can't give you anything but love, baby," as both lyrics summarise the *ars poeticas* of seductresses (with solidarity, sympathizing with alterities,) regarded as freakish and tempting *persona non-gratas*, degenerated by-blows of the aristocratic royal theatrical family of the Hazards. Perry takes over narratorial roles so that Dora can unite with her arch-seductress grandmother whom she has never met, so that she can live her joy, sing her song and join her dance, so that she can do her share of re-membering Estella corporeally, by reliving her sensory experiences, the touch of sweaty, joining hands, the sound of the euphoric love-song, the taste of the mango ice-cream. In Perry's narrative intervention, Estella's voice is the maternal voice emerging in the son's speech, the foremother's word enriching the embracing granddaughter's text. It enacts a vocal subversion disrupting phallogocentric language from within and rendering women's writing inherently polyphonic. Since subversion cannot last, and Estella's re-membering, her fully embodied narrative revivification cannot be prolonged, she cannot be touched, felt for good, Perry consoles Dora by promising to have her taste 'Ice-cream Estella', a mango ice-cream topped with passionfruit purée named after her missed grandmother. This implies a multiply subversive gesture considerably influencing Dora's autobiografictional body-text. Firstly, the Name of the Grandmother as a token of sensory pleasures (the ice-creamed named Estella) pokes fun of the psychoanalytical concept of the authoritative, restrictive, rational, domineering Name of the Father, as guarantee of unity, value and meaning. Secondly, corporeal experience, sensory pleasure, bodily identification, 'touching' becomes a pre-

requisite of 'real' remembering. In a mock, carnivalesque version of the Christian Holy Communion, the consumption of the symbolic body of the Grandmother in a (usually collective) gesture of commemoration not only enables the unification with her, but also brings along shared pleasures, sensory bliss, (instead of the painful remorse over the sinful body or the mourning over the divine sacrifice tormenting the Christian soul). Thirdly, the blissful re-membering of others enables the creation of the most sincere autoportrait ever drawn of the heterogeneous subject. The autobiografictional, corporeagraphic-metafictional body-text traces a self-freaking, self-fictionalizing, collectively singular, re-embodied identity that conceives itself in its relation to others, so that the re-membering of the self implies the recovery of a communal corpus, sharing the pleasures of relocating the margins of the self.

iii."Come off it, girls! Pluck the day! You ain't dead yet!": Grandma Chance's Voice From the Cupboard

The last narrative slip I turn to now, takes place chronologically towards the end of Dora's story, but it precedes and even predicts or prepares the 'orgasmic finale' of Dora's and Uncle Perry's geriatric passion reported by the emerging co-author Nora's supplementary narration, covering the hiatus of the 'gaping garment' in the bodily preoccupied, *jouissante*, silenced Dora's text.

Dora and Nora make preparations for their father's 100th birthday, they rummage in all cupboards, assort their clothes, accessories and make-up kits, trying to find the best 'composites' for reconstructing themselves as the famed Chance Seductresses, willing to charm everyone, but especially their father abandoning them, willing to regain his love at last. But, already their initial attempts at reasserting the Oedipal scenario are defeated—while, in the end, at the party the Father is fully demythologised being disclosed as a pitiful "papier-maché figure" (230)—, since again, it is the 'maternal line' that reclaims its significance in the formation of lives, stories and selves. This time, after the paternal grandmother's, Estella's initial revelatory and inspiratory entry into Dora's text, it is the foster-mother Grandma Chance turn. Grandma Chance transmits her lively message from the grave, by ironically speaking up from the opened clothes-cupboard, literalising the notion of the 'skeleton in the cupboard' to introduce herself as vital engine of Dora's narrative, as begetter and co-author of Dora's coquettish textual-, sexual- strategies, flirtatious body-text, and seductress' life philosophy, as a secret, 'inherited' ingredient of her charm. Grandma Chance's appearance in the text is accompanied by the intense corporeal presence that determines Dora's corporeally-incited narrative performance. Moreover, in this narrative slip, Grandma Chance's embodied

voice transmits a message from the wardrobe which will help Dora to re-evaluate the notion, the function, and the aim of remembering (both in the sense of corporeal re-membering).

Grandma Chance, the orphaned Dora and Nora's adoptive (grand)mother, has been a pacifist, a naturist, a vegetarian, a withered old lady, unashamed of her own aged body, fond of sensory pleasures (gin, walnut cake, cabbages, and sunshine), who used to roam naked in her house, smelling of cabbage and beer, absurdly mourning cut flowers, telling dirty jokes, and exercising an overwhelming effect on gentlemen (4). Primarily, she has been on intimate terms with all corporeal functions and pleasures. (She diapered and breastfed the baby twins, as Dora says: "She lullabyed us, she fed us. She was our air-raid shelter, she was our entertainment, *she was our breast.*" (29), and Dora even toys with the idea of their being offspring of Grandma's passionate "last fling" "pinning down the mattress" Melchior or Perry (223)). Grandma's bodily presence can be immediately felt on entering her room that smells of mothballs, boiled cabbage and gin, a personal fragrance characterising her throughout her lifetime, and staying behind after her death to fill the maternal, caring space of the Chance House. The experience of corporeality gets more intense on opening Grandma's wardrobe, which strangely resurrects not only Grandma's body and identity, but also Dora's and Nora's past selves and bodily performances(—thus, underlining the relationality of identity and remembering).

> As we opened the wardrobe, we saw ourselves swimming in the mirrored door as if in a pool of dust and, for a split second, in soft focus, we truly looked like girls, again. And going through those cast-offs was a trip down Memory Lane and a half, I can tell you. First, there was the lingerie—silk, stain, lace, eau du nil, blush rose, flesh, black and red ribbons, straight up and down things from the twenties, slithering things from the thirties, curvy things from the forties, waspies, merry widows, uplift bras. At the very bottom of the pile, I seized on something navy blue—the bloomers from our dancing class! From Miss Worthington's dancing class! To think that Grandma had kept our bloomers!
> Then there were the frocks. Some things we'd put away in plastic bags: bias-cut silk jersey, beaded sheaths that weighed a ton. Others we'd covered up with sheets, the big net skirts, the taffeta crinolines, halter necks, strapless, backless, etc. etc. etc. (187)

Their clothes assembled in Grandma's wardrobe help Dora and Nora to embark upon a nostalgic trip down "Memory Lane," enabling them to reassemble their past selves, liaisons, memories. The blue boomers recall the devoted debutante twin-dancers determined to charm all, the "foamy white georgette number with crystal beads" evokes Dora, the fatal muse who is just about to seduce the writer Irish O'Flaherty on the board of Super-Chief heading for Hollywood with the pair of aspiring actresses, the chiffon "in floral print, big splashy roses, rhodies, peonies, muted tones, dusky pinks, soft mauves, lavender" (188) revives the Dora of

17, first in love, prepared to make love with that blue-eyed boy 'borrowed' to her by her sister. As Nora claims, the seductress' clothes destabilise conventional historiography by tracing "a history of the world in party frocks" (187), but, in my view, they do much more. They also outline an alternative mode of self-writing——to be practised by Dora's autobiografiction—by highlighting the heterogeneity of the self, the performative and relational nature of identity, the relative stability of the Hollandian identity theme (of the seductress) (see Holland 1975), the Butlerian concept of gender as a repeatedly enacted stylization of the socially pre(in)scribed body (see Butler 1990), the inevitability of the *skin-ego* self-identifying the inner self on the basis of the corporeal out-look (see Grosz 1994), and the inherent coexistence of the compulsory body discipline and the potentially subversive reinscriptions of corporeal transformations. Furthermore, the fashionable, fetishizable lingerie, the bras, corsets and stockings, the silk, satin and lace seem to propose a feminist re-evaluation of *fetish* accessories. Her fetish props seem to *re-member*, to revivify, to reunite the seductress, to reframe and recollect her memories instead of fetishistically, sadistically *dis-membering* her, instead of objectifying her fragments to the scopophiliac male gaze, and associating her with threatening 'lack' or 'excess' to be idolatrised and/or annihilated. I would even go as far as to argue that this re-membering, this reunification of past memories and recollection of past selves menaces with the foremost danger of autobiographical writing: to be overwhelmed by the illusion of coherence, and the temptation to create a linear, teleological past, a meaningful, exemplary, significant story, a gradually developing, maturing, 'model-I'—and to create all this consolatory nostalgic nonsense with the aim to protect ourselves from, to compensate for the necessity of ending, the inevitability of death, and the sorrow of forgetting and being forgotten. Dora and Nora, standing in front of Grandma's opened wardrobe, see their past and present selves mirrored in the wardrobe door and in the clothes scattered around them, and for a moment believe to have authentically revivified the young girls they had been. They implore each other to remember correctly, and despair if they fail to remember. ("I pray you, love, remember." "She tried and tried but she could [not] remember [...]and then the corners of her mouth turned down." (188-189))

This is precisely the moment when Grandma Chance must intervene into Dora's recollections, so as to advise her on another, more pleasant and feminist way of re-membering their past re-embodied selves. As I have already mentioned, Dora's reminiscences are already characterised by a focus on the body inspired by the memory of Grandma's intense corporeal presence, thus, accordingly, Grandma does not interrupt Dora's narrative verbally, but enters

it via re-enacting her corporeal presence, via her 'resurrected' clothes cascading out of her wardrobe, virtually re-membering her body, that can speak up then, on its own turn.

> Then a **funny** thing happened. Something leapt off the **shelf** where the hats were....It was her hat, her little toque, with the spotted veil, that had spun out like a discus. And as we nervously inspected it, there came an avalanche of gloves—all her gloves, all slithery leather thumbs and fingers, whirling around as if inhabited by hands, pelting us, assaulting us, smacking our faces, so that we clutched hands for protection and retreated like scared kids as more and more of Grandma's bits and pieces—oilcloth carriers, corsets, bloomers like sails, stockings hissing like snakes—cascaded out of the wardrobe on top of us. We backed off until our calves hit the side of the bed with a shock of cold metal and then the wardrobe door closed of its won accord upon its own emptiness with a ghastly creak, leaving us looking at our scared faces looking back out of the dust.
> 'Grandma is trying to tell us something,' said Nora in an awed voice.
> Creak, creak went the door.
> 'She's telling us Memory Lane is a dead end. Come off it, girls! Pluck the day! You ain't dead yet! You've got a party to go! Expect the worst, hope for the best!'" (190)

Grandma's gloves (as if inhabited by her hands) "smack" the Chance girls' faces, as the polysemic verb suggests, the grand-maternal hands both kiss and hit, caress and challenge them with the aim of mockingly, caringly making them revise their (re-memberings of their) bodies, identities and texts. Grandma Chance's lines, "Memory Lane is a dead end. Come off it, girls! Pluck the day! You ain't dead yet! You've got a party to go! Expect the worst, hope for the best!" suggest, intruding into Dora's narrative, that the compensatory, consolatory, mournful nostalgia or the attempts at coherence, at truthful mimesis and teleological, linear reconstructions characterising the "Memory Lane" of conventional, patriarchal autobiographical genre should be abandoned. Instead, women's empowering and enjoyable self-writing should be fuelled by narrative-engines such as inventive deconstructions, imaginatively flirtatious, fibbing, forgetful re-imaginings of the past, internally decomposing compositions of self-fictionalizing, self-freaking, caring communal identities, (her)stories of performative, metamorphosing, spectacular selves, re-conceptions of feminist grotesque body-texts providing textual-, corporeal- pleasures to all readers. Dora's autobiografiction is motivated and enabled by Grandma Chance's embodied voice audible in this narrative slip, which both allows and teaches Dora to live re-membering as a corporeal experience.

Grandma's way of re-membering—that is practised by Dora throughout her memoirs constituting the novel's corpus—is closely connected to feminist grotesque corporeal performances. Her autobiografictional writing models itself after Grandma's make-up, 'feminine' gossip, and the bricollage of the invented Chance family.

As I have already mentioned, Dora and Nora's making-up their faces can be put in parallel with Dora's making-up of their autobiografictional narrative. The cosmetic beautification constitutes a frame to the seductress' memoir. (They make-up their faces at the text's beginning and ending, on the morning and evening of the very same (birth)day when the story is told). Make-up signifies a strategy of seduction that implies a self-fashioning performance, a play with signifiers of femininity, a simultaneous enactment of the singular freak *a(-)woman* and the mythic, universal *Woman* (De Lauretis 1987, 124), an enactment of a corporeal revision and a resistance against being enclosed within one single homogenising identity. Here, it is noteworthy, that the sisters' characteristic, freakishly exaggerated make-up on their septuagenarian faces—resembling faces of female impersonators, painted harlots or children in warpaint—is a self-stylisation inherited from Grandma Chance, the grotesque 'old crone' who never loses "a rakish air" (27).

> She [Grandma Chance] always put on so much Rachel powder she puffed out a fine cloud if you patted her. She rouged big, round spots in the middle of her cheeks. She used so much eyeblack that kiddies on electric Avenue used to give her a chorus of 'Two Lovely Black Eyes' as she passed by. For all the thirty years we knew her, thanks to peroxide, she was canary-coloured blonde. She always pencilled in a big, black beauty spot below the left-hand corner of her mouth. (27)

This is exactly the style which remerges in Dora's mockingly self-freaking corporeal-, and textual performances alike, in her autobiografiction and make-up, thus, enabling the de/refacement of her hyper-spectacularises, dis/re/appearing selves, which constitute metamorphosing masks more telling than her own face.

The *clichés* in Grandma's narrative intervention ("Pluck the day! [...]You've got a party to go! Expect the worst, hope for the best!") clearly point to the conventionally feminised discursive modes, those kitsch, hysteric, emotional, superficial and loquacious utterances, labelled by the umbrella term of *gossip*, which are categorised as unserious, untrustworthy, invaluable 'languages' restricted to the private, feminine sphere. Yet, Dora's narrative (like Fevvers' and Eve/lyn's) make use of precisely these feminine discursive styles (Dora being particularly fond of gossip), by overwriting them to mock them as stereotypes, and revitalising, recycling them as enabling narrative-engines of women's writings. In Dora's alternative historiography, she weaves (t)he(i)r stories, of women, freaks and othereds, of insignificant events, private spaces, uncertain times, and moveable-feast-dates, she writes in minor genres, unreliable discourses, self-destabilising styles and creates a patchwork of blurred photographs, torn tabloid cuttings, tall-tales, pub rumours, backstage anecdotes, soap-

opera simulations, dirty jokes and day-dreamings. These unserious writerly methods, her gossipy style, her fibbing, frivolous, forgetful, flirtatious narrative, "the vernacular force of her speech magically [...]transcend[ing] the written word" (Webb 1994, 294) all revise gossip —usually regarded as a scapegoating, outcasting practice of bored, malicious women[139]—to disclose a 'positive,' feminist version of gossip. In *WC*, gossip emerges as a communal activity that fosters social cohesion and solidarity, that allows for collective creative co-authorship, and provides a channel to share information pleasurably and playfully without claims to authority—thus, enforcing the plurality of perspectives. The Chanceian gossip characterised by a predilection for excessively verbalizing transgressions, allows for collectively re-experiencing violations of social norms, and provides a potential to support members of society in need, spreading the call for solidarity. (see Elias 2001, Szvetelszky 2001) Dora's feminist gossip appears as the most appropriate means to represent subversive, communal, freaked (mock)feminized identities.

Lastly, the "invented family" (35, 165) founded by Grandma Chance resembles make-up, gossip and Dora's narrative tactic in so far as it is the inventive creation of a '*bricoleuse*'[140] who makes improvisations, using as diverse and multiple material as she can, to generate a heterogeneous, hybrid, open work of pleasure to be enjoyed, and further elaborated collectively. Dora's seducing 'patchwork narrative,' polyphonic voice and hybrid texture match Grandma's invented family "put together out of whatever came to hand—a stray pair of orphaned babes, a ragamuffin in a flat cap" (35). This is an invented family indeed that 'adopts' all female outcasts in need, by embracing the foundling Our Cyn, her working-class daughter Brenda, and her daughter, the black Tiffany, as well as the aristocratic Lady Atalanta coined Wheelchair (Melchior's first wife, crippled and abandoned by her biological daughters), or even Daisy's (Melchior's second wife's) mongrel she-cat on heat. The family-heads, Dora and Nora replace Grandma to fulfil both positions of mothers and fathers, express their preference for polygamy and their lesbian affections (110), and fight ageism by spectacularly enacting octogenarian seductresses. (see Day 1998, 209) Dora's text, like the invented family, is created out of bits and pieces, is made up of sheer of force of personality (34), and is governed (instead of patriarchal domination) by a *sisterly solidarity* and a *mothering care*, an excessive feminine *economy of gift*. Grandma Chance raises the twin sisters not due to blood relations, "not out of duty, or due to history, but because of pure love" (12). The seductress' narrative cascades and whirls, it overflows and overwhelms us like the invented family's unlimited love, like the avalanche of clothes spilling out from Grandma's wardrobe.

Just like Estella's name associated with corporeal delights, Grandma Chance's name—that Dora does not think for one moment to be her [Grandma's] own name, either (26) —is a(n) (m)othering name that frees the adopted daughters from the repressive, compulsory story prescribed by the Name of the Father, by the trademark of the distinguished theatrical dynasty of Hazards. In return the prodigal Chance daughters pay a tribute to Grandma's (invented?) name in an unbelievable, imaginative, more of a luckily *chancy* than an ominously *hazardous* story. Like Estella's carnivalesque grotesque spirit, Grandma's freakish make-up, communal gossip and invented family live on as major engines of their wise (grand)children's narrative. Moreover, the identification is so complete, that within this narrative slip it is very hard to differentiate in the last line Grandma's direct voice from Dora's indirect voice. Accordingly, the day of storytelling begins with Dora promising to get all skeletons out of the closet and ends with grandma's ghost virtually spilling and speaking out of her wardrobe.

Grandma's 'revenant sentences,' "Memory Lane is a dead end. Come off it, girls! Pluck the day! You ain't dead yet!" bear a further special significance, since Dora's comic and seducing story is also a narrative on how the inevitable and insupportable ending, the desired and daunting death gives meaning to all lives and stories. (see Brooks 1984) Therefore, strangely, even the 'narrative-stimulating,' beloved grandmothers' grotesque deaths (Estella, impersonating Desdemona, is stabbed while in bed with her lover by her jealous husband, and Grandma dies tipsy in a bombing in the war on her way to a local pub) seem incompatible with Kate Webb's argument on the carnivalesque mode of subversion's being ill-suited and fatal for women (Webb 1994). These tragicomic events, instead, seem to suggest that freakish grotesquerie can even evade, surmount death, and even death can be 'survived,' mocked and seduced via storytelling, as Dora's grandmothers live on 'happily ever-after' in the memories and narratives of their offspring. (Even the names of the grandmas' become immortal—though in a non-authoritative, joyful, père-versive way—they appear as the stage names of the vaudeville actress Chance sisters, label the gustatory pleasures of ice-cream Estella, and surface in the illogic of Chance and the joy of 'star-dance' (of 'Estella-A-Star-Danced Hazard') governing Dora and Nora's life-stories.)

WC is indeed a novel that intertwines in a grotesque imbroglio the seduction of /by Woman, of/by Death and of/by Narrative. Dora, a seductress by profession flirts with her readers and with the conventions of autobiography by providing multiple, alternative endings to her story, and refusing to grant a final closure. The novel's last chapter recounting Melchior's 100th birthday party contains multiple ecstatic ending, which instead of closing, increase narrative tension, textual pleasure and readerly excitement. Dora's story strikes us

with a quick succession of punchlines, which all deceive us by pretending to be 'the final finale,' the uttermost peak of excitement, yet, which are augmented further on. Oedipally troubled Saskia serves up a lethal chocolate cake in the from of the Globe Theatre but fails to poison anyone. Uncle Perry, long believed to be dead, 'resurrects' to make a fabulous entry accompanied by a flock of tropic butterflies. The lost Tiffany jumps out of a gift box and re-enacts the self-freaked *femme fatale* by refusing to marry the treacherous Tristram who impregnated her. Lady A. discloses Perry as the real, biological father of her daughters raised by Melchior, while Melchior finally embraces Dora and Nora as his own daughters instead of their patron Perry's. (Thus, fatherhood is revealed as a movable feast, a hypothesis, while motherhood a biological fact (216, 223)), Dora makes love with Uncle Perry in an ultimate passionate 'fling.' Melchior's mythic cardboard crown is found. Dora and Nora adopt Garreth Hazard's twin babies. Moreover, in a postmodern manner, Dora occasionally intervenes among these finales by metatextual comments, with the aim to highlight the illusoriness of closures, the relativity of happy-endings ("if you choose to stop the story there, at such a pause, and refuse to take it any further, then you call it a happy ending" (227), "I am not sure if this a happy ending. I cross my fingers" (228)), or to stress the inherently unfinished, incomplete, open-ended, continuable nature of all stories ("We can tell these little darlings here whatever we like[...]but whatever we tell them, they'll make up their own romance out of it" (230), "you never know in the morning what the night will bring" (231)). Dora's trademark seductive ambiguity characterises her relationship to death and the narrative too. She "refuses point-blank to play in tragedy" (154) ("'Let other pens dwell on guilt and misery' A., for Austen, Jane, *Mansfield Park.*" (163), ironically claims that "life goes on, even if you don't" (163) (she repeats Grandma's 'wardrobe-message' "Life must go on!" when she opines: "purple flowers pop up in the bombing sites almost before the ruins stopped smoking, as if to say, life goes on, even if you don't" (163), and she mockingly argues for the need of a comic, optimistic perspective ("We knew that nothing is a matter of life and death except life and death" (215)). Yet, she is also convinced of the fact that "the carnival's got to stop, some time "(222), knowing that comic words are merely soothing compensations, that humans are "compelled to face mortality with only the fragile armor of their imaginings" (Sage 1999, 40).

Perhaps, it is not by chance that *WC* is a story about the seductions of women, narratives and death. It is Carter's last novel, her swan song—an *hommage* to the swan of Avon, master of comedies, and a last song of love to life, rapidly accepted among the "canonical texts of the postmodern feminist sensibility" (Sage 1999, 39)—in which Carter, dying of cancer, invents for herself a carnivalesque old age she dreamt of, but could never have.

Dora's narrative seems to re-enact the commonplace assertion on storytelling's being an archaic means of enchantment, endowing the finely recited narrative with an ultimate seductive capacity that can even lure death and thus promise immortality. As already the narratorial duo of Fevvers and Lizzie in *NC* suggested, female seduction and storytelling are most memorably interrelated in *A Thousand and One Nights*, a quintessence of the enchanting art and act of narration, in which Scheherazade escapes the murderous rage of the misogynistic king—who wants to take a revenge on his treacherous wife by murdering all women of his kingdom, marrying them one by one in the morning and executing them in the evening—by casting a spell on him with a narrative that she keeps weaving and leaves unfinished each evening and promises to continue the next day. As numerous post-structuralist theoreticians highlight—Barthes (1975,), Brooks (1984) and Foucault (1984, 102) among them—the parabolic tale perfectly illustrates the interrelatedness of narration, death and desire, as well as humanity's atavistic knowledge of death (and, according to Freud, even a desire for death's quiescence), intertwined with our primordial fantasy of outwitting mortality and of warding off death via our narratives. Furthermore, Scheherazade's tales not only reinforce the cultural, representational practice that projects upon desirable female bodies the anxieties and fears related to the tempting, threatening mortality, or to the unknown other world (see Bronfen 1992), but it also outlines a potential mode of female authorship. This alternative authorship enables womenwriters, like Dora, not to control but to flirt meanings, not to frame but to challenge stories, not to surrender but to subvert endings, not to fight but to seduce Death. On the one hand, the narrative outfights death (ending, passing, forgetting) by promising immortality via infinite remembering. Yet, on the other hand, it also entails the Barthesian *death of the author* (Barthes 1977), since Dora (modelling Carter) does not want to appropriate or to control her text or its meanings, but instead opens it up for co-authoring readers invited with her to 'pass-out' in textual pleasures, to'come' in(to) orgasmic finales, to lose consciousness and their self in carnivalesque communal narrative joys.

In the last scene, the septuagenarian Dora and Nora (dis)appear as wizened and weakened, fatally mortal beings, who, nevertheless, find joy balancing on the brink of the other-world, since they seem to 'transcend' death. Their violation of frontiers of death and life is intertwined with their transgressions of cultural limits. Through metamorphosing from *femmes fatales* to *femmes vitales*, embodying wis^{z}ened children and feminine freaks, and gaining and granting immortality as womenwriters of flirtatious, fibbing and forgetful seductress-narratives they break and blur boundaries of mortality and vitality, of mortality and immortality, of re-membering and forgetting, of materiality and memory, of female

corporeality and masculine creativity, of autonomous individuality and collective otherness. These two laughing "batty old hags" (5) in charge of a baby carriage and a narrative, ironically mime the Bakhtinian "senile pregnant old hags" on the famous Kerch terracotta tableaux collection (Bakhtin 1968, 25) that inspired Bakhtin's work on the carnivalesque grotesque. Yet Dora and Nora's textual sortie merrily subverts these misogynistic Bakhtinian arche-icons of the grotesque female corporeality by their becoming wizened yet wise(ened) children, demystifiers of cultural constructions of feminities and freaks, of mythical fatherhood and biological motherhood. They are self-made transgender mothers and fathers of an invented family of their own, eternal enchantresses, revelling over the pleasure of being alive, of being able to seduce, and not to die but to live for love. Dora departs singing the central love-theme of the seductress, leaving her text charmingly unfinished, promising new pleasures to come: "we'll go on singing and dancing until we drop in our tracks, won't we, kids. What a joy it is to dance and sing!" (232). The seductress Dora's life story begins and ends geographically in the same place, nevertheless, this return to the home on Bard road does not signify a frustrating impossibility of journey (like in *PNE*), nor an entrapment within the private sphere, within an iconic image of femininity, nor a narrative closure, but rather suggests that home may be a space of located freedom and liberating location, embracing caringly all manifestations of 'otherness' that do not fit in the compulsory story. The sudden appearance of Garreth Hazard's twin babies—illegitimate offspring of an invisible character of the family history, unexpectedly pulled out from Uncle Perry's giant pockets as surprise-bunnies from a conjurer's hat—definitely overflows, ruptures or flaws the conventional narrative flow (of family romance, autobiography, historiography alike). It disturbs the re-established order, the safe novelistic closure, the happy ending of the final reconciliation with the *pater familias* on Melchior Hazard's birthday party, and instead leads towards the trademark Carterian 'orgasmic finale(s)' (multiplied this time) of the self-freaking seductresses' unchained merriment that opens up the text to generate new stories of seduction, conceived by these wizened and wisened children.

VI. Conclusion

„But I'm a creep,/ I'm a weirdo/What the hell am I doin' here?/ I don't belong here
I don't care if it hurts,/ I wanna have control/ I want a perfect body/ I want a perfect soul"
(*Radiohead* 1994)[141]

i. Aims and Achievements

My study proposed to interpret Angela Carter's final three novels, *PNE* (1977), *NC* (1984) and *WC* (1992) as a trilogy with the aim to analyse the complex interrelationships of

the ideological constructions and the subversive re/deconstructions of bodies, texts, identity and femininity. I primarily wished to examine the *grotesque* as a compulsory marker of feminised, marginalized, culturally inscribed bodies, and also as a potential starting-point of revolutionary feminist reconsiderations of (re)embodied identities as eventually empowering entities. I demonstrated that the Carterian grotesque heroines—the macho surgically transformed by revengeful militant feminists into a perfect woman to match the biologically male transvestite performing the quintessence of femininity, or the winged giantess aerialiste birdwoman, or the septuagenarian seductress coquette crones—all enact spectacular corporeal-, textual- performances induced by their freakish, grotesque quality, their culturally-conceived abnormality and unnaturality, which they consistently emphasize and exaggerate. They revise Mikhail Bakhtin's ungendered *carnivalesque grotesque*, and even go beyond Mary Russo's (feminist re-reading of Bakhtin on) the culturally engendering *female grotesque*, to realize their own (père-)version, the freakishly dis/re-embodying *feminist grotesque*. Thus, they succeed in performing a 'subversion from within the system to be subverted,' in relocating the 'margin' as an alternative, (self)destabilizing, non-excluding, metamorphosing 'kernel,' by mockingly starting out from their 'otherness,' their overplayed femininity, their exaggerated corporeality and their over-identification with grotesquerie, their 'trademark' *self-freaking*s throughout their narrative-compositions, their identity-formations, and their corporeal self-stylizations alike. The *self-freakings*, when the Carterian heroines put their freakish selves on show and deliberately display their differences, on the one hand serves as a self-reflexive, ironic metatext on the inevitable, insupportable patriarchal representation of femininity as cultural monstrosity, paradoxically simultaneously idealized and abjectified as eternal 'other' of the violent hierarchy of en-gendered binary oppositions. On the other hand, they also contribute to the emergence of a corporeally-motivated *body-text*, a freakishly self-decomposing *somatized* narrative that stylistically-narratologically re-enacts the deformations, contortions and grimaces of the *semioticized* grotesque body, and thus, challenges the canonically constituted corpus of women's writing, blurs conventional categories of genre and gender, troubles concepts of *phallogocentric language* and *écriture féminine* as biologically predetermined, mutually exclusive categories, and defies the incompatibility of feminised corporeality/corporealised femininity and authorship. Most importantly, the Carterian heroines' spectacular *self-freakings* foster a feminist, 'non-sacrificial' *freak-ethics* of care that embraces 'otherness' as a part of the 'self,' as well as a *feminist epistemology* based on a re-evaluation of partial perspectives, fictionalized, fragmented facts, enigmatic, incomprehensible, silenced, or non-linguistic utterances, and

singular yet solidarity-based subjective standpoints (—besides the *feminist poetics* based on bifocal, re-visionary, counter-narrative pleasures).

I performed a close-reading of Carter's novels by relying on the most prominent theories of gender studies and the ideology-critical *post-semiotics of the subject* (Kiss 1996, 9-28)). I combined various analytical methods, primarily gender-sensitive interpretive strategies of *gynocritics*, *gynesis*, *gender-reading* and *lecture féminine*, and I recycled Anglo-American and French feminisms, complemented by strategies of *reader response criticism*, *post-structuralist narratology* and *theories of the subject*, with the aim to create *deconstructive feminist readings*, generated by hybrid reading strategies shaped to the deform form of Carterian grotesque bodies and texts.

The body of the texts examined has been located within the context of the canonized corpus of 'women's writings,' of the canonically, institutionally feminised 'female literary tradition' and of the ideologically interpellated, engendered, corporealised, objectified 'feminine-subjectivity.' However, via an internal subversion, the categories of 'femininity,' 'womanliness,' and 'femalehood' have been denaturalized to be revealed as discursive, cultural, social constructs prescribed to be automatically performed. Simultaneously, the Carterian 'writing on/from' the grotesque body, the self-freaking corporeal-, textual- counter-performances have been disclosed as empowering, revolutionary feminist subversions of these social artifices, communal myths, unquestionably consumable cultural ready-mades.

My analyses proposed to fill a fundamental gap of the current Carter-reception, since besides the heterogeneous subject and the subversive body, which have been up to now the primal objects of interest of the criticism on Carter, they also concentrated upon the dynamics of signification, the textual vibrations, moves, slips, the narrative blind-spots, ruptures and overflows. Within my stylistically, rhetorically oriented close-readings I tried to decipher how the ideologically disciplined yet transgressive body is (de/re)constructed via the Carterian fiction's destabilizing discourse and narrative subversion. I paid a special attention to the category of the *culturally en-gendered* and/but *freakishly re-embodied identity*, enacted by fantastic fictional bodies and texts.

The terms introduced in the present study might be of further use: *bifocal reading*, *corporeagraphic metafiction*, and *autobiografiction* trace a more general model for interpreting pieces of contemporary Anglo-American women's writing characterised by a tendency of standing within women's literary tradition while subverting it internally, whereas *feminist grotesque*, *self-freaking*, or *freak ethics* can be reapplied during the analysis of the (female) body-image articulated in contemporary artworks.

I undertook to perform a simultaneous study of the *somatization* of the text inscribed upon the body and of the *semioticization* of the body emerging in the text, with the aim to reveal that the magical realist text of the Carterian heroines' fictional autobiographies are actually 'moved,' (dis)organised by their self-freaked feminist grotesque bodies, while the texture of the fantastic is weaved and unweaved by the unspeakable and thus, compulsively re- an re-narratable, uncontrollable corporeality. The heroines of Carter's fiction, Eve/lyn, the forcedly feminised misogynist macho picaro/a, Fevvers the aerial(ist) giantess, winged birdwoman, and Dora and Nora Chance the twinned septuagenarian *femme vitale*-like showgirls, all make use of their perplexing, metamorphosing, (dis)appearing bodies as textual engines. These grotesque bodies 'fuel' (inspire and enable) the mock autobiographical narrative's self-freaking identity-performances, its multifaceted, ideologically disciplined *and* subversively embodied subjectivity, and its heterogeneous, discursively constructed *and* intralinguistically, ventriloquously subversive corporeality alike. Moreover, these spectacular bodily performances at the kernel of the self-fictionalizing self-writings turn the narrative, the storytelling itself into a performance, a show, a spectacle, a seduction, a confidence-trick or a magical illusion. I studied the grotesque heroines' bodies and narratives in parallel, wishing to unveil the ideologically prescribed femininity's text *written on the body* and the subversive, ironically hyper-feminine, parodically ineradicably masculine, masculine-feminine, or feminine-masculine, transgender voiced text *written from the* fantastic, abject or sublime *body*, the freakish re-embodiment. My analysis traced how this latter body-text transgresses symbolic representation, conventional language use, canonized generic frames, narratorial conventions, habitual reading methods, just as much as the naturalized, normative identity categories, the socially engendered, hierarchically distributed subject (op)positions, the hegemonic order and the category of indisputable truth. A simultaneous reading of the freakish grotesque heroines corporeal and textual performances demonstrated how these spectacular performances of plural, playful self-deconstructions (subversive acts of disrupting and inventively reorganizing bodies, texts and identities as metamorphic entities) rewrite the patriarchally prescribed myths and limiting representations of femininity (the cultural myths of abjectified and hyper-corporealized, or mystified and dematerialized Woman). They also revision canonically feminised literature by questioning prejudices towards women's writing (oft labelled either as a sentimentally kitsch, popular or as an incomprehensible, hysteric, elitist text designed for a laic or professional audience of solely female readers) and by challenging stereotypes of female authorship (the womanwriter's being identified as either a 'silly lady novelist' or an 'unintelligible madwoman').

I analyzed *PNE* as a polyphonic, cacophonous text built on self-contradictions. I examined how 'feminine' and 'masculine' discourses interrupt each other within the first person singular, (pseudo)autobiographical narrative of Eve/lyn, the 'irredeemably' masculine hero transformed into a merely seemingly hyper-feminine heroine. I deciphered the simultaneous speech and mutual silencing of two conflicting voices, that of patriarchal tradition's misogynous, marginalizing, masculine voice aimed at disabling women via conventionally limiting patriarchal representations, and that of a feminist voice engaged with weaving an ironic *corporeagraphic metafiction* to invite women for the recognition of their mis(self)recognition in the ideologically prescribed, engendered feminine subjectivities. My feminist geographical analysis mapped the stations of the passion of 'becoming (monstrous) woman,' and revealed how the Carterian fiction's fantastic cities and spaces embody fetishized, fragmented, mutilated female body parts. I disclosed how New York, Beulah, the desert, the glass house and the cave by ocean in the novel take the forms of the devouring vagina dentata, the sterile womb, the wounded breast, the crying eyes, or the regurgitating mouth. I revealed how the topography of pain maps the anatomy of the grotesque female body, and how the symbolic Mother Earth gradually mutates into a 'no-woman's-land.' During my main line of argumentation I unveiled how pathological psychosomatic symptoms of body dysmorphia (unrealistically distorted body-(self-)image that troubles predominantly female patients psychically tormented by the ideology of beauty-myth) emerge on multiple levels: in the text's bodies, spaces, territories, symbols, narratives threads, and particularly in its (self)contradictory, mutually castrating-abortive narrative voices, and their antagonistic interpretive possibilities (feminist manifesto *versus* misogynous, masculinist pornography). I followed how the entire text, both in its narrative images and style, embodies the 'devouring-disgorging' bulimic body that dismembers itself apart, traumatised by the incompatibility of the (already paradoxical) social expectations of (passive, objectified, silenced, corporealized) femininity and the individual aims at the inherently masculinized authority and activity.

I interpreted *NC* as a text (de)regulated by various laughing bodies. Beneath the feminist birdwoman aerialiste's communal, carnivalesque, festive merriment, and her dark double's, the uncanny clown's excluding, compensatory derision, I disclosed at the heart of the text the *joie de vivre* of children, the hilarity of play, the childish laughing fit evoking the burlesque. Moreover, the text resonated by a childish frenzy of laughter (and perchance motivated by children's grotesque bodies) applies narrative strategies and plot-structures which mimic child-plays, as the very dynamics of the Carterian narrative seems to be governed or inspired by the infantile humour of the jack-in-the-box, the puppet on strings, the rolling snowball, the

pick-a-boo, the tickling game, the chasing game or the nonsense symbolic play. I revealed that laughter as a textual engine functions beyond the thematic level on a stylistic level as well. The pace, the tempo dictated by the complex, overwritten, periodic sentences invite the reader ready to enjoy the oral qualities of the text to re-enact the rhythmic deep breathing of a laughing person. During the close-reading of the text, I argued that the excess, proliferation and ambiguity of the freakish grotesque body become textualized via the poetic figures and tropes which depict the irregular corporeality. The hyperboles, pleonasms, catachresis and complicated metaphor-chains attribute to the narrative a heterogeneous, antagonistic, debauchery-dwelling quality, and thus, really enable the text to *embody* the carnivalesque grotesque body it textualizes.

In *WC* I focused on 'one half' of a set of legendary twin seductress ex-showgirls, Dora who gives an account of the fascinating events of her life, by narrating on her 75th birthday (within the temporal frames of the very same day) her memoir combined with one and a half century of theatre history, family saga, fashion chronicle, personal historiography, and a manual to the art of seduction. I argued that Dora, like her twin sister Nora, is a 'natural born seductress,' a septuagenarian comedienne still decoded as a diva, who identifies her narratorial self simultaneously as a *femme fatale-vitale* and as a senile, wizened old crone, a grotesque flirty hag determined to mockingly destabilize fixed identity categories. Dora performs her femininity as a game, and constitutes her narrative as a flirt. As I have highlighted, quite tellingly, both at the beginning and the end of the story, on the morning and evening of the birthday, as if in a frame, Dora is portrayed while she is applying her make-up. Her cosmetic self-stylization of her face, its exaggeratedly hyper-feminine and grotesquely clownish, individually expressive and mask-like make-up coincides with the un/remaking, the rewriting of femininity, self-identity and text, all circumscribed as illusion, trick, a game of signs. In my view, Dora is a risk-taking player with a spectacular appearance who intertwines the aesthetics of disappearance (make-up, masquerade, mimicry) with the resistance to the invisibility of the marginalized (the aged, working class, (unmarried, non-reproductive, anti-ideal) woman, freak), and, thus, she succeeds in seducing, in flirtatiously troubling the key signifiers of the Symbolic Order, such as Truth, the Phallus, the Gaze, or Death. As I proposed, the perfect fake face painted on the decaying real face constitutes an idealistic, illusory simulacrum and a grotesque self-parody to model the inherent defacement of the auto-portrait. Dora's made-up narrative is a treacherously faithful autobiography built on gossip, tall-tales, jokes, and mis-rememberings, fibbing, forgetfulness and flirtation, alternative versions of truth, relativized realities, and multiple endings. The logic of

reproduction is replaced by the logic of seduction. I examined how the narrative (self)(de)constructs itself as flirtation, how the narrative strategies of the text enact all the tricks of the seductive body via reader-teasers, enigmatic narrative slips and unending endings which are winking and swinging, arousing and rejecting, coquettishly-playfully seducing and betraying readers. I studied how the narrator lies, distorts and secretively conceals while she assures to tell the truth, how she promises to solve all secrets, while she hides most and inventively fictionalizes the rest of them, how she arouses curiosity, prolongs points of culmination, deliberately defers the satisfaction of final denouement, or multiply stages cathartic, orgasmic finales.

My close-reading analyses consequently concentrated on the relationship of body and text. I introduced how Eve/lyn's vacillation between the stereotyped poles of sentimental feminine and objectivity-oriented masculine discourse embodies the devouring and disgorging bulimic body, and models in general how the body-disciplining ideological technologies both cannibalistically incorporate and disgustedly expulse the threatening, 'indigestible' corporeality. I examined how Fevvers' overwriting, loquaciousness, and catachretic over-accumulation of poetic tropes mimes the body revelling in a frenzy of laughter. I studied how Dora Chance's gossipy, teasing, secretive and seductive, enticing and reticent, flirtatious narrative enacts the winking, glancing, swinging seductress' coquette body. I argued that the heroines' narrative styles model themselves upon the consuming-secreting body, the laughing body, and the sexualized female body respectively. The first person singular narrators ironically create their self-identities on the basis of their pathologized feminized female bodies, so that the source of the (life)writing subject's activity and creativity becomes precisely the female body that had been previously regarded—due to its femininity and corporeality—incompatible with concepts of authority, activity and authorship. I demonstrated that Carter's heroines are ingenious storytellers, writing women who narrate their stories of 'becoming womenwriters,' their stories of their self-fashioned, re/deconstructed, re-embodied identities which are discovered as unique textual engines. In place of the name of the Author they put their irregular bodies as trademarks of their (mock)autobiographical narratives. Evelyn 'autographs' her story with her devouring-regurgitating bulimic body, Fevvers 'signs' her text with her frenetically laughing, infantile or hysteric body, while the flirtatious Dora Chance 'underwrites' her narrative with her aging, nymphomaniac body.

Throughout my interpretations I aimed at examining how the Carterian heroines revive the tradition of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque grotesque body, how they enact this

heterogeneous, irregular, metamorphic, material body that is able to resist the classic, closed, disciplined body and its representations, as well as to confront the social hierarchy, the hegemonic order and ideological regulations. My study also revealed how the heroines' spectacular gender performances stage the potentially subversive, thus, communally marginalized, 'othered' female grotesque body described by Mary Russo. Finally, I disclosed, how Carter revolutionarily re-invents Russo's "stereotypical grotesque codings of the female body in Western culture" (Russo 1995, 15), how the Carterian excessive re-enactments of the 'classic circus freaks,' the revisions of the Female Impersonator and the Starving Woman (embodied by *PNE*'s transgender and bulimic Eve/lyn and transvestite and anorexic Tristessa), of the Fat Lady and the Monstrous Hysteric (embodied by *NC*'s histrionic giantess aerialiste, Fevvers), or of the Unruly Woman, the Aging Woman and the Siamese Twins (embodied by *WC*'s flirtatious, grey-haired Chance twin-sisters), all open the way towards a new, non-normative, daring *grotesque body- and identity politics* based on sisterly solidarity. *Freak-ethics* is based on a tempting-threatening, monstrous-marvellous *alterity*, that leads towards an innovative, dynamic model of new social subjectivity, towards new ways of reading ourselves by starting out "on the side of the freak" (Russo 1995, 12). The Carterian freak ethics surfaces in the recognition of our misrecognition via finding a mirror of the self in other (as in *PNE*), in the healing power of laughing together *with* (and not *at*) others (as in *NC*), or in the Gilliganian mothering care and the Kristevan heretics of love shared by the open, invented family (as in *WC*)

I argued that one of the most convincing reasons why the novels analysed in the present study can be read as the last Carterian trilogy, is that all the three texts operate with a first person singular narrator who attempts to reconstruct her life-story via (mock)autobiographical reminiscences. In *PNE*, Eve/lyn on the final station of her gender-bender passion looks back on her picaresque adventures from a feminine-masculine, transgender perspective in a retrospective narrative, in which naming herself in the third person singular can be considered as a tricky rhetorical strategy or a traumatic symptom of her self-alienating self-portraiture. In the first part of *NC* the circus-star-aerialiste Fevvers recapitulates her unbelievable career-story in an interview given to the pragmatic journalist Walser who, fatally charmed, later becomes for her sake a circus-clown and a correspondent on Colonel Kearney's Grand Imperial Tour. He undertakes the narrator's role to tell *her* story, "a series of inside stories of the exotic, of the marvellous, of laughter and tears and thrills and all" (90) in a voice fully 'infected' by the birdwoman's feverish style. (Although the third person singular narration predominating the second and third parts of the book can also evoke infantile self-

denomination, apt for a (self)(life)writing fuelled by a childish frenzy of laughter.) In the final *WC*, Dora embodies the mature Carterian autobiographer, who commemorates her 75th birthday by a sustained first person singular memoir recollecting her own and her populous family's life-stories. In my view, the trilogy's texts surpass and subvert the concept of fictional autobiography. These narratives, taking the form a confessional reminiscence, an exclusive interview, or a recapitulative birthday balance, spectacularly transgress all the definitive constituents of the category of 'classical autobiography'. They refuse retrospection, mono-vocal prose, teleology, the universal masculine subjection position, and most importantly, the truth-telling of the Lejeunian *autobiographical pact*. Instead of a trustworthy representation of the authentic 'I,' they present fictionalized self-portraits, metamorphic, performative, illusory identities, real *self-freakings*. During the Carterian autobiografictions, the sincere self-writing turns into a self-deconstructive rewriting of one's life and self in flirtatious, fibbing, forgetful autobiograf(ictionaliz)ers' narratives based on confidence-trick, delusions, tall-tales and gossip. In the mock-autobiographical reminiscences of the emphatically unreliable, ironic narrators, the self is constituted as a fiction, a *trompe-l'oeil* identity whose performance inherently contains its own self-ironic revision too. The Carterian heroine agrees with De Man's postmodern view on the impossibility of autobiography, on the inevitable de-facement of the self-portrait, on self-representation's being limited by figurative language. Yet, she does not try to conceal her own fictionalization, displacement or disfigurement, she does not feel frustrated by her own limits, or disillusioned on being de-faced (faced with the impossibility of pinning down the intratextual self and with the incapacity of the extratextual self's aspired authority). But, on the contrary, the Carterian autobiografictionalizers cheerfully disclose their excessive self-fictionalization, and teasingly invite readers to share their pleasures resulting from their over-played self-maskings, their infinite de-/re-facements.

I suggested that a major characteristic of the Carterian novel is that it questions the canonical category of the feminized corpus of 'women's writing' while, at the same time, it 'recycles' the very same 'feminine literary tradition' within self-reflective, critical metatexts which comment upon the ('feminine'?) textuality/literary quality of past, initial, and recent, contemporary works, including her own. Via Carter's 'feminist-feminine' revision, the easily entertaining, popular, 'feminine' text is inoculated with a 'feminist' poetics charged with ideology criticism and queries on the social formation of subjectivity. The Carterian novel—a piece of postmodern women's writing with multiple modernist features—has a penchant for transgressing rigid divisions of genres and genders, with the aim to challenge the patriarchal

canon's gendered hierarchisation of genres and to reappraise women's literature. In her heterogeneously hybrid, intertextually-invested, colourfully carnivalesque text, on the one hand, she reformulates in sophisticated intellectual 'high style' the traditionally 'low,' popular, often 'femininized' genres: the fairy tale, the 'oral tradition' of folktales, nursery rhymes, vaudeville jokes, Hollywood cinema, along with the rather 'masculinized' horror fiction and pornography. On the other hand, she demythologizes, popularizes and 'feminizes' conventionally 'high,' 'masculinized' genres, as the historical novel, the picaresque, the (auto)biography. Most importantly, she reappropriates 'feminine literature' with a difference by both nostalgically recalling *and* internally subverting it. The *female* Gothic of Ann Radcliff, the *female Bildungsroman* of Jane Austen or the Brontë sisters, or the *female* stream-of-consciousness of Virginia Woolf, or women's popular romance nowadays called 'chick-lit' are 'recycled' through excessively over-writing *clichés* of feminine discourses in kitschy, gossipy or histrionic modes, and ironically re-enacting stereotypical authorial positionings of the 'silly lady novelist' and of the 'madwomanwriter.' A *par excellence* example for the hybrid writing-mode of contemporary women's writing is the *magical realism* used by Carter, that combines common characteristic features of feminism and postmodernism—as humour, irony, playfulness, subversion, transgression, recycling, and revision—to destabilize the limiting canonical category of (ideologically) feminine(ized women's) literature.

Inspired by Linda Hutcheon's *historiographic metafiction*, I called Carter's novels *corporeagraphic metafictions*: self-reflexive texts on the *graphing* of the *corpus*, (on the writing on/from the body and the body of writings), critical commentaries on the ideological prescriptions *onto*, the cultural inscriptions *upon* and the corporeality-generated subversive rewritings *from* the *individual body* of the engendered social subject, as well as on the *collective corpus* of canonically feminized, marginalized women's writings. (These latter are associated with the body either because their authors are deprived of authorship's authority by being identified with passive, objectified femininity's irrational corporeality, or because they exploit the *semioticized, text-somatizing* body in the text as the very engine of narrative subversion). *Corporeagraphic metafictions* destabilize and denaturalize as 'cultural myths' the discursively constructed, socially disciplined, conventionally comprehensible, normative and irresistibly interpellating hierarchical gender oppositions prescriptively inscribed upon subject(ifi)ed corporealities and communal literary corpuses, with the aim to interface them with the singular narrative-, and corporeal- re/de/constructions of the self-inventing, self-ironic, autobiograf(ictionaliz)ing heroines, and their freakishly re-embodied identities' *body-texts*. Thus, the traditionally *feminine, ideologically feminized* body's and the transgressively

gender-bender, genre-bender, *feminist freak* body's and re-embodied identity's texts are read/written and (de/re)constructed simultaneously.

My argumentation concluded that the rewritten feminine text also encourages new readerly approaches. The feminist strategy of rewriting—Carter calls a "demythologizing business," "putting new wine in old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottles explode" (Carter 1983, 69, 71)—revisions fossilized patriarchal myths, recycles stereotypes of women's literature, repeats clichés of feminine style and conventions of women's restrictive representations. However, this inventive, internally subversive, ironically self-reflexive re-writing succeeds in generating a *feminist-feminine text* via a winking, mocking, teasing meta-textual quality that surfaces in narrative slips, textual gaps, or uncontainable over-writings. The fundamental paradox of re-writing, 'feminist-feminine' text and (self)ironic metafiction is that it has to invoke the very ideology (myth, representation, genre) it aims to criticize and subvert. Therefore, the (woman-)reader approaching the text is invited to consider multiple interpretive strategies. (The ambiguity and multivocality of the Carterian *corporeagraphic metafictions* allows for their being simultaneously interpreted as convention-bounded 'feminine,' or even patriarchally contained 'male impersonating,' or as materialist feminist or even utopian feminist texts, depending on the co-authoring reader's realization or rejection of the ironic metatext.) I highlighted that Carter seems to agree with the numerous feminist literary critics and theoreticians of the tradition of women's writing in English, (Gilbert and Gubar, Lanser, De Lauretis and Rich among them), who regard women's writing as a polyphonic text, a double voiced discourse, a palimpsest that equally contains both the silenced, marginalized, 'feminine' and the dominant, canon-shaping, 'masculine' readerly-, writerly-, critical- communities' social, literary and cultural heritage.

Accordingly, instead of differentiating between good or bad, lay or professional, naïve or elite, feminine or feminist readings, I proposed to trace a less hierarchical model of readers' receptions and productions of meanings, by introducing the concepts of *myopic and bifocal readerly points of view*, and *bifocal vision* as an expression for the complex experience of *corporeagraphic metafiction*. The myopic readerly stance perceives merely the repetition of the original, traditional feminine text, recognizes the conventionally feminine style, representation, theme, genre, but lacks a distanced critical reflection. The myopic reader accepts the textual, narrative, identificatory positions offered by the text, appreciating them as feminine and positive, suiting and satisfactory, and finds pleasure in discovering that the rewritten feminine text—recycled with a difference—provides a happy ending for women. The bifocal readerly point of view simultaneously deciphers the ideologically disciplined,

normativized, feminized socially subjected body and canonized literary corpus, while it also interprets the feminist texture of the poetic, politic, playful re-writing fuelled by energies of heterogeneously re-embodied 'subjects and meanings in process.' It fuses the experience of direct identification and distanced self/meta-reflection. Unlike in a hierarchical relationship, the feminist bifocal revision inherently contains the feminine myopic vision. Prior to the reader's potential feminist illumination, before becoming a critically self-conscious reader performing a *bifocal (re)vision*, one is always already a *myopic reader* who realizes and enjoys the original, conventionally feminine text, (as a textual manifestation of the ideological technology of gender that addresses the woman-reader as a feminine subject expected to apply feminine interpretive strategies restricted to 'lay' pleasures of unproblematized identification and consumption). One must pass through the stage of the mandatory ideologically interpellating engendered ('feminine') reading in order to provide a subversive ('feminist') reading (that will inherently incorporate the initial 'feminine' reading). The text inviting a *bifocal reading* encourages its readers to re-enact the Carterian self-freaking heroines' confidence trickster (identity-)performance based on a play of 'now you see me, now you don't.' Readers are encouraged to realize the *trompe l'oeil* effect of the narrative that clicks back and forth between feminine and feminist text, to enhance simultaneously identification and self-reflection, both (mis)(self)recognition and recognition of mis(self)recognition leading to reconstructions. The text addresses its ideal reader as a reader located in a *myopic* (limited/feminine) position that is contained and expanded by the *bifocal* re-visionary (liberating/feminist) position. The interpretive delights of the bifocal readerly stance recall the complex pleasures of the ironic perspective based on the tricksy tactics, the playful process of '(mis)recognition-deconstruction-reconstruction-(re)recognition.' The hierarchical 'either/or' is replaced by a 'both/and,' by a bifocal perspective's potentials, by inherently intertwined 'feminine' and 'feminist' readings, by the simultaneity of a solidarity-based locatedness within a feminine tradition and a self-destabilizing, nomadic feminist re-vision.

ii. Further Usages of the Body-Text Model

The model of interpretation outlined in my study—that focuses on putting in parallel bodies and texts, on tracing interconnections of *semioticized* bodies in texts and *somatized* texts on bodies, on simultaneously studying corporeally motivated, materially metamorphic, heterogeneously subversive *body-texts* and *corporeagraphic metafictions* which criticize ideological body-disciplines and canonical corpuses—can be of further use by being applied in the analysis of other pieces of contemporary (post 1960s) women's writing in English.

Initially, I wanted to write a dissertation with a threefold purpose of interpreting the Carterian corpus along with Toni Morrison's and Jeanette Winterson's works. However, on realizing the incredible richness of Carter's oeuvre and the finite nature of an academic study, I decided to dedicate all my attention to Carter's fiction. Nevertheless, in conference presentations, seminars, and studies composed in parallel with my dissertation I argued for the potential of Winterson's and Morrison's (and some of other contemporary womenwriters' as Fay Weldon's, Anne Rice's, Margaret Atwood's, or Joyce Carol Oates') fictions being read as magical realist texts fuelled by freakish bodies of 'othered' identities. (see Kérchy 2001, 2002, 2006)

In Toni Morrison's novels, traumatized black bodies re-enact, re-formulate their abjectified corporealities in order to heal them in a communal re-membering granted by the Afro-American cultural heritage of the oral traditions of slave narrative, and particularly blues and jazz music, which vibrate and hold together the mourning-melancholic texts wounded by the narrative gaps of the unforgettable, unspeakable, irrevocable pains. Morrison narrates stories of awry, horrific loves, lost beloveds, missing mothers, insatiable desires, inherited traumas. Her novels are full of bleeding, vomiting, lactating, putrefying, decaying, dementing, desperately desirous yet strangely sublime bodies. Her heroines feature the ugly little black girl maddened by the unattainable, normative beauty ideal propagated by blonde, white dolls (*The Bluest Eye*, 1970), the black mother mourning and resurrecting her baby she murdered to save from slavery (*Beloved*, 1987), the group of miserably othered black women secluded into a Convent at the edge of town to personify the evils and repent for the sins of the community (*Paradise*, 1992), and all the women who go mad, wild or die due to the infinite displacement of desire, the inherently unsustainable nature of satisfaction (*Jazz*, 1992). Historiographic metafiction is turned into the counter-narrative of post-traumatic stress disordered discourse that passes on stories which are not stories to pass on[142], that jazzes the text of desire and narrates the blues and the beat of the heart in a rhythmic, melodic, weeping, vibrating text.

Jeanette Winterson, one of the most popular contemporary 'postmodernist,' (occasionally 'magical realist'), 'feminist,' 'lesbian' authors—who, in my view, has been considerably influenced by Angela Carter's writings—explores not only the boundaries of these labels characterising her art, but also the boundaries of the physical and the imaginary, the grotesque and the beautiful, the tempting and threatening, of discursively and corporeally (de)constructed subjectivities, gender polarities, and sexual identities alike. Winterson writes about risk-taking, revolutionary, polymorphously perverse, androgynous heroines: the ex-vivandière, gambling, crossdressing, Venetian boatwoman with webbed feet to walk on water

(*The Passion*, 1987), the monstrously enormous, puritan-beating Dogwoman and the twelve dancing princesses who dance away from marriage (*Sexing the Cherry*, 1989), an ungendered narrator composing a lyrical, rhapsodic eulogy on the beloved's desirable, disappearing, cancerous body (***Written on the Body***, 1992), or the cyberspace traveller who impersonates simultaneously Scheherazade and the Wandering Jew by arousing her/his lovers' curiosity via weaving open-ended stories on the world-wide-web (*The PowerBook*, 2000). The Wintersonian narrative—much like Carter's—is primarily concerned with finding an appropriate language for these metamorphic bodies via formal experimentation, poeticized prose, linguistic plays, embodied voice, textualized touch, hybrid combinations fusing extremes as windows software's terminology and biblical allusions, or alternating narrative ruptures and excesses, which all fuse to create a language of passion, of devotion, of ecstatically abandoned and found selves. In the end, this traces a subversive lesbian aesthetics or poetics where the mapping of the erotic body coincides with the textual pleasures of the narrative, where the fictional webbed-footed *gondolière*, Villanelle bears the name of a traditional rhyming, rhythmic poetic form that originates from a song accompanying a physically pleasant peasant dance, where other(ed) wor(l)ds and bodies interact to invent fictional "stories to be trusted"[143] and to take pleasure in.

The list could be continued with Fay Weldon's heroine in *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* (1983) who transforms herself from a horrid looking, inefficient suburban housewife—called a third-rate person, a bad mother, a worse wife, a dreadful cook and a she-devil by her treacherous husband—into a real, glittering eyed she-devil. The she-devil takes revenge and power, and subverts her conventional, unsatisfactory feminine roles with the help and the loves of differing, deviant 'others,' marginalized or contained, outcast or normalized by society (the mentally disabled, the sick, the alcoholic, senile and incontinent, a midget directing a madhouse, a sadist judge with a passion for bondage, an abstinent, ascetic priest, or a group of lesbian feminists). Finally, after a masquerade of metamorphic, self-masking mock-identities and pen-names under which she rewrites the story of her life, she reconstructs her body in an excessive series of plastic surgeries into a simulacrum of femininity, the very double of her husband's ex-lover, the romantic authoress, Mary Fisher. Thus, inspired by her freakishly re-embodied, devilish-feminine body, she, the re-named Marlene Hunter succeeds in becoming a writer of/in her text, in (de)composing a (parodically) feminine text (in Mary Fisher's style) without wiling to publish it. For her it is enough to know she can do it—in a different way.

Further examples could be given, but for the sake of brevity I shall stop here. By no means do I wish to make over-generalizations, nor suggest that each and every piece of contemporary women's writing in English operates with simultaneous, spectacularly self-freaking corporeal-, textual-performances, with feminist grotesque bodies, fictionalized identities and somatized narratives. However, I believe that the interpretive model outlined in the present study that proposes a parallel focus on self-freaking bodies and narratives, enriches with thought-provoking (bifocal) perspectives and insights the analyses of a 'suspiciously' increasing number of contemporary women's art 'obsessed' with grotesque—excessive, transgressive, corporeal, abject, monstrous, metamorphic, hybrid, blissfully jouissant, playfully performative, perverted, etc—bodies. The 'body-text interpretive model' highlights that these narratives are intent on uncovering and unmaking bodies in order to expose and question our contemporary culture's 'truths,' anxieties and *Zeitgeist*. Most importantly, the model suggests that all the troubling contemporary texts featuring grotesque bodies bear the potential of tracing an alternative identity politics, a *freak-ethics* that encourages embracement via solidarity instead of a cannibalistic incorporation, and that helps us to survive (in) our grotesque, 'creep' corporealities.

Moreover, in my view, Carterian fictions—besides inviting feminist critical readings, co-authoring, bifocal, revisionary readerly approaches—provide lessons for variants of an enabling feminist critical language use. *PNE* heralds a polyphonic, ambiguous, occasionally self-contradictory, thus, non-authoritarian textuality, *NC* propagates a deconstructive yet feminist-wise located discourse, *WC* speaks a seducing language fuelled by solidarity, while all the narratives combine playful and ethical strategies of self-destabilizing relativization and responsible locatedness.

iii. The Contemporary Relevance of Carter's Freakish Bodies

Although even the latest of Carter's novels was published more than a decade ago, the central problematics of Carterian fiction related to the cultural productions, the pathological manifestations, the subversive performances and the self-freaking identity politics of grotesque bodies are more relevant and up-to-date than ever. Our contemporary Western society—this post-industrialist, capitalist, patriarchal, phallogocentric, hegemonic, consumer society of spectacle—prescribes to us extremely paradoxical body-images to identify with. Therefore, our socialization is inherently accompanied by the ideologically disciplined subject's grotesque cultural embodiment, the constitution of Barker's *supplementary body*—meaning the cultural construction and containment of a normatively neutralized, safely decorporealized, artificially homogenized, *positive body*—haunted-tempted by repressed

corporeality, bodily functions, drives and desires (Barker's brutishly material, residue-like, *tremulous, private body*)). (Barker 1984, 71-113) Advertisements turn idealized bodies into norms, and represent asceticized (dieting, fitnessing, epilating, cosmetic surgically enhanced) bodies as eroticized bodies who endeavour to stimulate the desire for consumption via a simulated orgy associated with the product on sale, but actually contradicting the corporeality strictly controlled via/due to ideologically infiltrated representations. Our bodies are simultaneously spectacularized (as the identity is increasingly enacted on the surface of the body stylized by fashion industry's fetish props to create the most trendy and individual look, an ephemeral image destined to (fail to) represent the self) and are self-disciplined (through the interiorization of the surveillant gaze of the Foucauldian 'eye of the power' that turns the soul into a prison of the body, or through a pathologizing medical gaze that decodes bodies in terms of (ab)normal symptoms). Bodies are hypervisible, but only in an aestheticized, anaesthetized form: in advertisements blood is always blue, diapers never smell, deodorized bodies do not sweat, women's hunger can be satisfied by bite-size sweets, the sick bodies remain sexy. (In the most recent Hungarian TV ads, a woman with heartburn lets her skirt, loosened furtively under a restaurant's table, gently slip off her thighs, while a menstruating girl cheerfully performs a graceful gymnastic exercise at a sports competition). The real corporeality seems unrepresentable, ob-scene. The postmodern promise of infinite possibilities resulting from the plasticity of bodies, "the fantasy of self-mastery in an unmanageable culture" (Bordo 1993, 250) coincides with the inevitable social, cultural pre/inscriptions, the power technologies' ideological discipline, engendered stylizations and discursive manipulations on/of the framed, contained, representationally closed body. The illusorily authentic, unique self coexists with the inherent intertextuality of an identification with ready-made, simulated images (illustrated by the slogan, "Be yourself, buy Adidas!"). Representations address spectators as similar, mythic *Woman and* differing, singular *a(-)woman* of De Lauretis, as victims of marginalized, metamorphosing, monstrous corporealities *and* masters of contained, controllable bodies. The dream of presence that surfaces in extreme sports, swinger parties, radical body modifications, or the latest craze of Californian youth hanging themselves on meat-hooks (in de-contextualized initiation rites deprived of meaning) and the awareness of the inescapable prison-house of re-presentation, of inevitable mediation, of everything's being a 'copy of the copy,' a 'recognition of misrecognition' reflected by recurring (self)ironic metatexts, are parallel phenomena. Today's sexualized body simultaneously implies an immediate, deathly, divine, erotic, 'interior experience,' and an alienated simulation-like cybersex, and a demonized threat originated

from otherness (AIDS being the 'fault' of gays and blacks). This paradoxical logic is repeated in the rhetorics of advertising and the functioning of commercialization whereby the Zizekian idiotic pleasure of consumption is offered to hedonistically situated customers who, strangely, also resemble Baudrillard's androgynous android-like, disillusioned, postmodern subjects deprived of desires by the overflow of satisfactions. Our bodies, despite their being obvious cultural, discursive, representational constructions, are still primarily identified with corporeality, and are regarded by common sense as natural, 'raw,' material, biological entities. (An increasing number of psychic disorders are explained by biological malfunctions, and pills like Prozac replace the Freudian 'talking cure'). Yet, the natural body is nearing its extinction in the Western world as our bodies become technologically supplemented or medically reshaped. Even if we have not undergone plastic surgical interventions or organ transplantation, we resemble half-human, half-machine cyborgs: non-organic material like amalgam fills the holes in our bad teeth, contact lens ameliorate our eye-sight, toxic material circulates in our bodies infected by environmental pollution, and we regularly plug ourselves into the world wide web, or augment our body image by mobile phones or cars.

Emerging new social, political, historical, cultural phenomena reorganize bodies in radical ways. The actual ecological disaster that contrasts the simulated edenic pleasures of popular media commercials' rhetoric, and the threat of terror enacting a cancerous internal subversion of the system, destabilize all safeties, and emphasize ethical considerations. Like the internet enabling the formation of new identities mapped in cyberspace both as unreliable self-fictionalizations and as relational, solidarity-governed members of e-communities, they foster fundamentally destabilized, metamorphic, ambiguously re-embodied identities.

In Elizabeth Grosz' opinion, our bodies are discursive constructs inscribed with cultural texts and personal histories constitutive of the subject, yet they are not merely blank pages (just as they are not purely biological entities either), since the material(ity) of the inscribed surface influences the text produced. Thus, bodies are also characterised by a *counter-productivity*, by a potential to generate new, surprising, unpredictable meanings and identities, to extend frameworks attempting to contain them, to entail the grotesque dis-/re-embodiments and typically Carterian self-freakings which deconstruct and re-inscribe the ideological inscriptions of compulsory, controlled cultural embodiment. As Grosz ingeniously suggests, the bodies' 'inside out' and 'outside in' are intertwined: the body-image, the psychical structuring of a corporeal exterior (how inside constitutes itself as outside) and the body as a socio-cultural artefact (how the social inscription of the body's surface generates a psychical interiority) are vitally inseparable. Accordingly, Grosz' theory traces the mind-body relation

not in term of a hierarchical binary opposition, but in the shape of a tricky Möbius strip that fuses 'inside out' and 'outside in'—mind/body, inside/outside, psychical interior/physical exterior, private/public, self/other, nature/culture, psychic/social—and via this *corporeal feminism* of hers (Grosz 1994, xii) points towards the feminist freak ethics, characteristic of Carter too, that embraces 'otherness' as part of the 'self.'

As I have repeatedly suggested, the material body as a site of power-struggles has particular stakes and relevance for the women who experience daily disciplinings of their bodies as they bind, push up, work out, pluck, epilate, paint, deodorize, dye and stylize them to meet the normative ideal, the impossible criteria of the sexist, racist, ageist, conformist, normative beauty myth nourished by the fashion-, beauty-, diet-, fitness- and porn-industries, responsible for body image distortions and (dis)embodiment-related psychosomatic disorders.

No wonder that contemporary women, writers, theoreticians, artists alike, like Carter, feel an urgent need to resist and revise these limiting, disabling, mutilating cultural inscriptions governed by the ideological *technologies of gender* (De Lauretis 1987). I shall turn now to a fascinating number of artists who embark on their re-inscriptive, counter-narrative project by starting out from their spectacularly grotesque, freakishly feminine bodies. Besides the literary texts already mentioned, numerous painting, photos and particularly performance art or body art pieces[144] propose to trace a *feminist* poetics, ethics, epistemologies, canon-reevaluations or simply textual pleasures via exploring the multiply subversive potentials, the *counterproductivity* (Grosz1994, xi), the *counterspectacularity*, the *counteridentity* (Berlant-Freeman 1997, 170) or the *counternarrativity* (Somers-Gibson 1994, 75) provided by monstrous and mocking, seducing and repulsive, sublime and abject self-freaking bodies and their playful-political performances of self-fictionalizing, alternative identity constructions. Our daily cultural grotesque bodies, especially women's, re-emerge in subversively freaked, freakishly de/reconstructed, re-embodied artistic bodies conceived as hybrid, heterogeneous, transgressive entities. Like 'natural' physiological freaks or the fantastic Carterian bodies, they represent and challenge the culturally constituted boundaries (see Russo 1996, 79) between self and other (Siamese twins, Carter's Chance sisters), between male and female (hermaphrodite, Carter's Eve/lyn and Tristessa), between the body and the world outside the body (the monster par excess, Carter's circus clowns, confidence tricksters and spectacular performers), between animal and human (feral and wild man, Carter's birdwoman), and finally between art and life (side-show attractions, body artists and carnal players).

Very much like Carter, contemporary body artists[145] reformulate self-freaking bodies as sources, sites and producers (actors, directors, spectators) of their subversive texts. "My body is my art" is one of the telling slogans of French 'carnal art' performer Orlan's ongoing radical 'operating theatrical' project. In a series of lively broadcast plastic surgical interventions, since 1987, she has aimed at redesigning her body, first by carving in her flesh archetypal traits of feminine beauty borrowed from canonized artworks (Mona Lisa's forehead, the chin of Boticelli's Venus, the eyes of Boucher's Europa), and later moving towards a nonconformist anti-aesthetics inspired by forgotten cultures (like the horn-like prosthetic implants on her forehead recalling aztec skull deformations, and the enormously enlarged nose that imitates ceremonial nose supplements of the mayas). Orlan's corporeal presence is both reinforced and troubled by her counter-spectacularities. Her surgically opened body is multiplied on museums' video screens, and in shockingly realistic or computer digitally manipulated photographs, by relics of her removed body parts, purchasable fetishes of her corporeal debris, and her future corpse, a 'body-work-in-progress' arrested in its metamorphoses, and destined to become identified as a museum exhibit.

The ex-prostitute, pornstar, self-appointed neo-saint courtesan sex goddess and sexual healer, feminist performer Annie Sprinkle's 1994 *Post Porn Modernist Show* stages the erotic, eroticized female body to rewrite myths of femininity and subjectivity in an autobiographical performance. The narrative reconstructions of identity are complemented by 'corporeal confessions' of the bosom ballet, the golden shower of urination, the masturbation-meditation, or the public cervix announcement, all written by/from the artist's very body, her corporeal interiority. Her aim to rewrite ideological inscriptions on the body-surface, to resist the *skin-ego,* and to reveal and celebrate the unrepresentable, ob-scene, abject, freakish, culturally repressed, 'othered,' material aspect of the self.

The list of outstanding feminist body art performances is very long. Initial rebellious attempts at locating the self-freaking body as a means of empowerment, authorship, and criticism include Ana Mendieta's *Cosmetic Facial Variations* (1972) that deconstructed the beautiful feminine body by misplacing its props (pulling her thighs on her head, masking her face with her shampooed hair), or her land-art body prints which problematized the appearance and disappearance, the presence and absence, the memory and the oblivion of physical bodies. In Carolee Schneeman's *Interior Scroll* (1975) the naked artist read out from a text literally pulled out of her vagina her criticism on the patriarchal canon's exclusion of women from art history. Gina Pane's (1970s) and later Marina Abramovic's (1990s) experimentations with the limits of pain in self-mutilating performances meant to demystify

the cultural myth of feminine martyrdom as a cover that serves to hide the ideological process of 'scapegoating' that sustains the patriarchal hegemonic order. More recent works were performed by Lesley Dill and Beverley Semmes (1992, 2003), whose speaking, imprisoning or self-dismantling clothes comment upon the ideological technology of fashion, and the body-disciplining engendering function of clothing.[146]

Memorable freakish feminist grotesque bodies also overabound in contemporary art photography.[147] Hanna Wilke's shows the shocking sublime in her haunting double portrait series of her own and her mother's decaying, cancerous bodies in a strange Pieta where the girl tries to hold her dying mother (a mother who dooms her to death) while photo-frames ruthlessly prevent their touching (1978). Diane Arbus' ingenious, unsentimentally moving, empathic, even celebratory photos portray culturally 'othered' freaks marginalized by a society demanding conformity. That normative, self-disciplining social neutralization-homogenization is rejected by Arbus' photos' homosexuals, transvestites, nudists, giants, midgets, twins, partying senile pensioners, people with disabilities and other socially contained, irritatedly tolerated outcasts of the US of the 1970s. However, in Arbus' art they are portrayed somehow 'positively,' from the viewpoint of the 'other,' from the alternative perspective of the freak, from *their* perspective becoming *ours*. Nancy Burson carries out a very similar project concerned with 'seeing' as a token of 'believing,' metamorphosis, and alternative evaluations of difference. After her early 1980s' digital morphing technologies challenging sciences of human physiognomy's (frenology's and eugenics') creation of links between appearance, intelligence and racial superiority, and her 1997 *He/She* series of umbigously gendered portraits demonstrating the fluidity of gender and our alternative 'alien' selves, during the 1990s she photographs 'special faces,' those of people altered by cancer, reconstructive surgery or prosthesis, and those of children with craciofacial anomalies. These sensitive pictures of strange visages question mass-produced normative ideals of immaculate beauty, problematize the social conditioning prescribing not to look corporeal difference, and stress the potentials of a 'loving look' in the transformation of vision. Jo Spence's proud self-nudes taken in 1982 after her masterectomy operate with a feminist camera therapy to describe breasted experience in a phallogocentric society, to present the breastless experience of femininity, and to question healthy and complete bodies. Elzbieta Jablonska pictures herself as a SuperMother (1976, 2002) dressed in a superheroine's costumes while performing the daily housewifely, motherly, feminine duties which she is socially expected to find full satisfaction in, via those 'idiotic pleasures' of the consumption and reproduction of the ideologically prescribed gender. In the 1990s Cindy Sherman and in the 2000s Nienke

Klunder parodically reenact stereotypical feminine roles brought to the extreme, until they fully abjectify their own subjectivities via their self-freaked self-portraits. In a shocking 2003 self-portrait series, entitled *Sequences*, Klunder transforms herself in a quick succession of shots from sexy chick to homeless 'unwoman' to *femme fatale* to traumatized soldier to hysteric, nymphomaniac madwoman to miserable clown). In Diana Thorneycroft's uncanny world her body is turned into a gender-bendered (mock)transvestite, a patchwork of puppets, ghosts, and shades of others (she constitutes herself as a collage with her family members' photos hiding parts of her naked body's 'real self') (1989).

We could continue our analysis of contemporary representations of freakeries by focusing on alternative beauties offered by Frida Kahlo's traumatized grotesque bodies painted with pain (1940s), or Jenny Saville's more recent paintings of deformed, overweight giantesses (1990s) , not to mention fantastic gender-bending films like Sally Potter's 1992 *Orlando* or Ulrike Ottinger's radically grotesque 1981 *Freak Orlando*.[147] However, the examination of these self-freaking body-texts should be the objective of a further analysis.

In place of conclusion, I wish to suggest that these contemporary feminist body artists, just like Carter's heroines, all use their spectacularized otherness, their fictionalized identities, their self-freaking bodies and grotesquely somatized texts to gain empowerment, to open the way towards a new, non-normative, daring *grotesque body- and identity politics*', towards an innovative, dynamic model of new social subjectivity, towards new ways of reading ourselves by starting out "on the side of the freak" (Russo 1995, 12).

Endnotes

[1] As Sarah Gamble claims, Carter creates for herself an authorial persona which does not necessarily have to correspond with actuality, with the actual Angela Carter in every particular. (Gamble 1997, 10)

[2] Since in my analyses I considerably rely on Peter Brooks' terms of "semioticization" and "somatization" and Teresa de Lauretis' "masculinization" and "desexualization," I will consistently use their spelling, and throughout my study I will spell contemporary theories' neologisms such as "relativize" with and "-ize" ending.

[3] Throughout my study I shall refer to the novels by these abbreviations: *PNE*: *The Passion of New Eve* (all quotations are from this edition: London: Virago, 1998), *NC*: *Nights at the Circus* (all quotations are from this edition: London: Vintage, 1994), *WC*: *Wise Children* (all quotations are from this edition: New York: Penguin, 1993).

[4] Carter's obvious influence on Winterson is particularly remarkable and salient in her powerful grotesque female figures, (*The Passion*'s webbed footed warwhore, *Sexing the Cherry*'s giantess dogwoman), her recurring lines mocking the truthful or fantastic quality of her text ("I'm telling you stories. Trust me."), her transgender themes (crossdressings and gender-benders), polyphonic narratives (Villanelle and Henri in *The Passion*, the Dogwoman and Jordan in *Sexing*), carnivalesque spaces (*The Passion*'s Venice, *Sexing*'s picaresque, later cyberspace), and blurred timelines (of magical realist *historiographic metafiction*). In Sarah Waters' *Tipping the Velvet*, the oyster-girl drag-king protagonist Nan King's song-and-dance-acts at the turn of the century London music halls—presented as performances which daringly invite and resist the male gaze, simultaneously reinforce and subvert gender roles—clearly evoke the trademark Carterian gender-benders (like that of Tristessa in *PNE*), identity-trickster female performers (like Fevvers in *NC*), and most obviously the grotesquely twinned music hall performance of the Chance sisters in *WC*.

[5] In the very same essay, entitled "The Mother Lode" she associates "the family talent for magic realism" with her mother, who is otherwise rarely ever commemorated in any of her fictional- or non-fictional writings: "My mother learned she was carrying me at about the time the Second World War was declared, with the family talent for magic realism, she once told me she had been to the doctor's on the very day." (Carter 1998b, 3)

[6] Heinrich Wölfflin describes the differences between the 16th century 'classic' High Renaissance art and the 17th century baroque art as a development from the linear to the painterly (a development of line as a path of vision, a perception of the object by its tangible character), a development from plane to recession (an emphasis of depth), a development from closed to open form (a relaxation of rules, a yielding of tectonic strength), a development from multiplicity to the unity of parts (unity is no longer achieved by a harmony of free parts but by the union of parts in one single theme), and a development from absolute to relative clarity of subject (the explicitness of the subject is no longer the sole purpose of representation, since composition, light and colour gain their own life) (Wölfflin 1950, 14-16)

I am indebted to Professor Sabine Coelsch-Foisner for calling my attention to Wölfflin's description of the 'baroque style' and its potential parallel with the Carterian manner of writing.

[7] Bayley in Jordan: "Indeed if there is a common factor in the elusive category of the postmodern novel it is political correctness[...]Carter always comes to rest in the right ideological position[...]Carter's achievement shows how a certain style of good writing has politicized itself today, constituting itself as the literary wing of militant orthodoxy" from: John Bayley, "Fighting for the Crown." *The New York Review of Books*, 23 April 1992, 9-11.

[8] Her fictional writing's magical realism seems to suggest that reality, "the world as it is" can neither be represented in an unmediated manner, nor can it be changed by shere ideas imposed upon others.

[9] Like the anti-racist slogan: "Black is beautiful."

[10] The New Woman's major aims were to receive an adequate education, to earn money and be financially independent, to participate in political discussions and decision-making, to make decisions of her own on marriage and childbearing, to wear more comfortable clothes, and, generally to defy convention and social norms in order to create a better world for women. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Woman>

[11] Shirley Peterson calls attention to the contextual irony of *NC* by noting that the novel published in the middle of the Thatcher era features (fictionalized versions of) early 19th century feminists, who would have conjured "a future feminist freak" in the shape of the Iron Lady of the 1980s, who as a prime minister ironically embodied the woman who is able to "to gain a simulacrum of true power by the cheap means of persecuting weak and unhappy classes or peaoples, just as well as men have done" (Peterson 1996, 299).

[12] As biographer Paul Barker claims, Carter specialised in medieval literature at Bristol University from 1962 to 1965, because she disliked the prevailing critical fashion for 'relevance' and 'social content' as advocated by F.R. Leavis. (Barker 2005, 2).

[13] In an interview with John Haffenden, Carter recalls her childhood memories which might have determined her preference for the oral, performative and playful qualities of narratives. "When my grandmother read 'Little Red Riding Hood' to me, she had no truck with that sentimental nonsense about a friendly woodcutter carefully

slitting open the wolf's belly and letting out the grandmother, when she came to the part about the wolf jumping on Little Red Riding Hood and eating her up, she used to jump on me and pretend to eat me. Like all small children, I loved being tickled and nuzzled: I found it bliss, and I'd beg her to relate the story to me just for the sake of this ecstatic moment when she jumped on me." (Carter in Haffenden 1985, 83)

[14] "The term flapper in the 1920s referred to a 'new breed' of young women who wore short skirts, bobbed their hair, listened to jazz and flaunted their disdain for what was then considered 'decent' behaviour. The flappers were seen as brash in their time for wearing makeup, drinking hard liquor and smoking." <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flapper>

[15] "There are whole lot of verbal games[...]that I really enjoy doing, 'the deer departed,' for example. People very rarely notice these when I'm reading them, but I think if you read it on the page[...]That's the sort of thing I like doing. These are sort of private jokes with myself and with whoever notices, and I used to enjoy doing that very much. There are lots of them in *NC*, which was intended as a comic novel" (Katsavos 1994, 15).

[16] "Il n'y a pas de différence entre ce dont un livre parle et la manière dont il est fait. Un livre n'a donc pas davantage d'object. En tant qu'agencement, il est seulement lui-même en connexion avec d'autre agencements, par rapport a d'autres corps sans organs. On ne demandera jamais ce que veut dire un livre, signifié ou significant, on ne cherchera rien à comprendre dans un livre, on se demandera avec quoi il fonctionne, en connexion de quoi il fait ou non des intensités, dans quelles multiplicités il introduit et metamorphose la sienne, avec quelles corps sans organs il fait lui-même converger le sien." (Deleuze-Guattari 1980, 10)

[17] The Kristevian concepts of the *symbolic* and *semiotic* modalities are dialectic yet inseparable modalities within the signifying process, synchronically constituting the language and the speaking subject alike (Kristeva 1985, 22)), while the Kristevian *phenotext* denotes the language with fixed meanings and social codes, that obeys the rules of communication, represents, objectifies and subjectifies, while being simultaneously inscribed with the *genotext*, a "plural, heterogeneous, contradictory process of signification encompassing the flow of drives, material discontinuity, political struggle and the pulverization of language" (Kristeva 1984, 88).

[18] In *(becoming) a(-)woman*, *'a'* is a privative, referring to un-womanliness intertwined with womanliness, monstruosity embraced with normality, and also alluding to Teresa de Lauretis' idea on the simultaneous identification with the interpellating, inevitable universal Womanhood and with being *a* singular, individual, heterogeneous woman (De Lauretis 1987, 124)).

[19] The dictionary definition of 'to freak out' is 'to become very anxious, frightened or to lose self control,' 'freaking' in slang means sexual intercourse or its simulation in an obscene dance, while 'freakin'' is used as a vulgar adverbial, functioning as a curse-word. <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=freaking>

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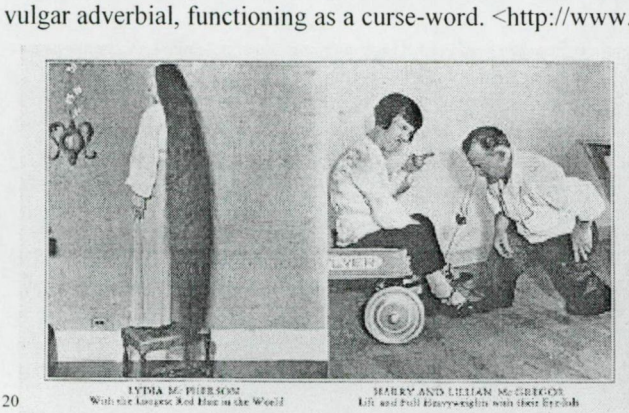
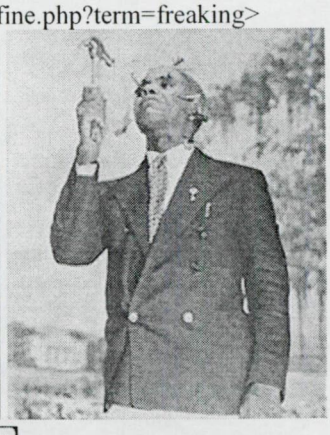
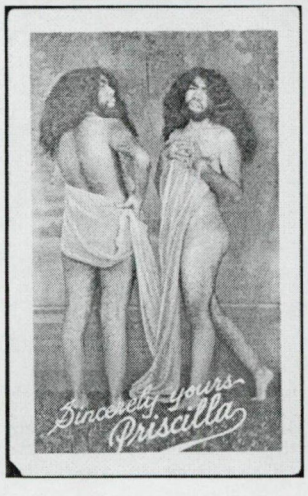
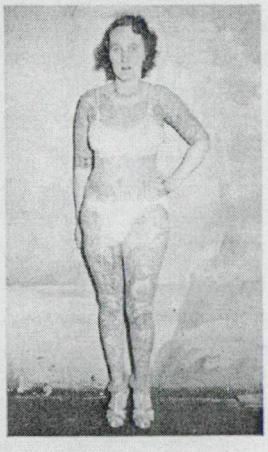


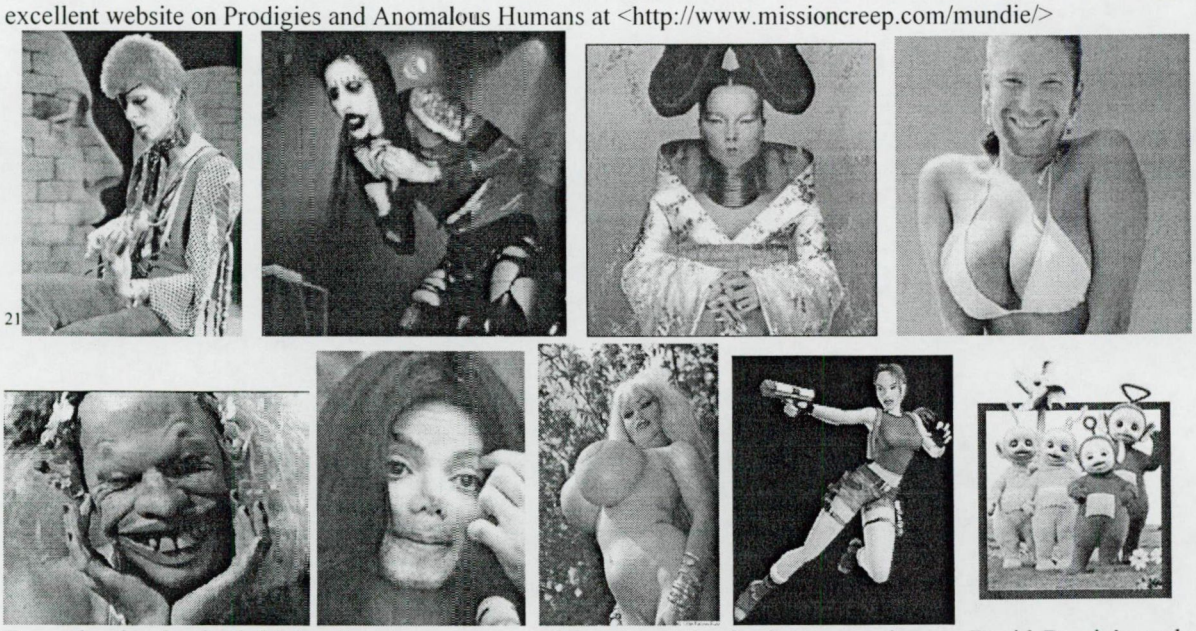






Lydia McPherson, The Woman With the Longest Red Hair in the World, Harry and Lillian McGregor, Lift and Pull Heavyweights with their Eye-lids, Leo Kongee, The Human Pin-Cushion, Martin Laurello, The Backwards Man, and Betty Williams, The Baby with 4 legs and 3 arms appeared at Robert Ripley's Believe It or Not Oddities Show at the 1933-34 Chicago World Fair. Ripley's "Believe It or Not Museums" exhibiting documents, (photographs, memorabilia) of freak shows and wax-works simulating human oddities are still popular across the U.S.. Baby Thelma, The Fat Lady, Percilla, The Monkey Girl and Jean Furella, the Tattoed Woman were U.S. freak-show stars of the 1930s and 40s. See James G. Mundie's excellent website on Prodigies and Anomalous Humans at <http://www.missioncreep.com/mundie/>

[21]



Examples for the freak idols of contemporary popular culture: the freak as a star-image: David Bowie's early 1972 persona, Ziggy Stardust, Marylin Manson as Anti-Christ Superstar, Björk as femme hybrid, Aphex Twin's self-hybridations, the 1990s' polysurgical addicts, Michael Jackson and Lolo Ferrari, trendy computer game heroine Lara Croft, and children's favourite Teletubbies

[22] Gilligan's "ethics of care" provided food for thought for fellow-feminists, who started thinking along the lines traced by Gilligan in order to elaborate a sophisticated feminist ethics that has played an increasingly significant role in feminist critical/theoretical thought. The aim has been to avoid the pitfalls of caring feared by many (as over-protectiveness, pathological dependency and inequality, romantic idealization, or the lack of regulative principles and the loss of autonomy), and to succeed in the reconciliation of responsibility and self-interest, of femininity and adulthood, of caring compassion and autonomy, of virtue and power, of private and public realm, of the ethic of caring and the ethic of justice. Conforming to the feminist consensus, reconciliation should not mean at any costs equation, universalization or relativism, but rather the broadening of ethical perspectives with the help of feminist ethics and politics (Jaggar 1991, 97-100), revealing different forms of caring in different persons' lives (Bowden 1997, 21). Some of Gilligan's 'major disciples' are worth to be mentioned even briefly. Joan C. Tronto underlines that the ethic of care should not be regarded as a specifically and uniquely women's morality. What Tronto calls a "contextual metaethical theory" (Tronto 1987, 656) is open to every player of society who is willing to turn social webs into relationships of care based on solidarity, consensus and cooperation, all contributing to individual progress and communal well-being as well. According to Nona Lyons, a sense of "connected self" should complement or become intertwined with the sense of "separated self" (in Tronto, 648). Peta Bowden defines caring as "ethically significant ways in which we matter to each other, transforming interpersonal relatedness into something beyond ontological necessity or brute survival" (Bowden 1997, 1). Furthermore, to various aspects contributing to the multiplicity and diversity of care, such as "mothering", "friendship" and "nursing", she adds "citizenship", broadening the ethics of care beyond the ground of close, personal relations. Nel Nodding in her *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (Nodding 1984) names "mothering" as synonymous with the ethics of dependence, caring, connectedness and altruism. Virginia Held argues that parental care could be used in social relations to foster peace in the world, and to better public institutions for child care, education, health care and well-fare as well as to improve economic activity. According to Held social cooperation is a precondition of autonomy, and the social contract (a contractual model of society -- contract law) is impossible without social cohesion, trust and civic friendship (a relational model of society -- family law). Justice should be combined with caring, the most basic moral value, indispensable for human being's survival as a human being. (Held 199) Daryl Koehn sums up the ethic of care as feeling with the other, creating a shared self and realizing fully one's individuality in the dynamics of the caring

yet autonomous self. (Koehn 1998) As Alison M Jaggar highlights, female ethical work is carried out on two parallel strands: beside the criticism of traditional ethical theory a perhaps even more important work is that of applied ethics, paying attention to such contemporary ethical issues as abortion, equal opportunities, domestic labour, the portrayal of women in the media, as well as issues concerning sexuality, as rape, pornography, the domestic abuse of women and the situation of women in developing nations (Jaggar 1991, 80).

[23] Weir criticizes even radical philosphers as Jacques Derrida and Jessica Benjamin for falling within the traps of "sacrificial logic" and, thus, failing to develop alternative theories of individual identity, as they simply reject identity and autonomy in the names of abstract, irreducible nonidentity or paradoxical, intersubjective connection. (Weir 1996, 14-42, 24)

[24] The macrodynamics and the microdynamics of the subject are terms introduced by Attila Kiss, who claims that "the historical problematization of the macrodynamics and the psychoanalytical account of the microdynamics of the subject cannot be separated and are always two sides of the same coin: the identity of the subject coined by the Symbolic."(Kiss 1995, 15)

[25] "To be the object of desire is to be defined in the passive case. To exist in the passive case is to die in the passive case—that is, to be killed. This is the moral of the fairy tale about the perfect woman." (Carter 1978, 76-77)

[26] *Writing Beyond the Ending* is the title of Rachel Blau du Plessis' book on narrative strategies of twentieth century women writers characterised by a preference for 'recycling' and 'revisioning' earlier works of women's literary tradition. (see: Rachel Blau du Plessis: *Writing Beyond the Ending*, Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985).

[27] Jonathan Dollimore uses a logic very similar to that of Butler, De Lauretis (and Carter) while he criticizes containment theory by claiming that transgression and subversion presuppose the law, but they do not necessarily ratify the law.

[28] For De Lauretis, "space-off," an expression borrowed from film theory, signifies "a movement from the space represented by/in a representation, by/in a discourse, by/in a sex-gender system, to the space not represented yet (implied) unseen in them" (De Lauretis 1987, 26)

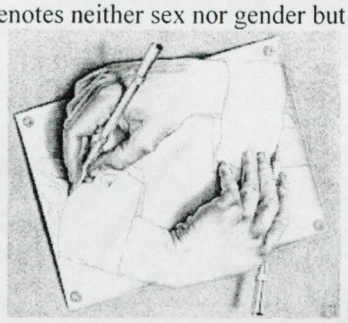
[29] "technologies of self permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thought, conduct and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, immortality" (Foucault 1988)

[30] For the elaboration of this argumentation I am indebted to Erzsébet Barát. On the feminist tactic of "subversion from within" see my article on Cindy Sherman's photography. (Kérchy 2003)

[31] Taking into consideration that femininity/ corporeality/ passivity are mutually exclusive and/ yet interdependent with subjectivity/empowerment in the patriarchal scenario of the subject-constitution, the paradoxically impossible antagonistic term *feminine subjectivity*, resisting and reinforcing ideology, thus, should be marked by Jacques Derrida's line of "erasure" (*sous rature*), marking and erasing suspicious, insupportable but inevitable concepts (See Bennington-Derrida 1991, 75)

[32] As Susan Bordo explains, according to the old metaphor of the *Body Politic*, the State or the society is identified with the human body, with different organs and parts symbolizing different functions, needs, social constituents, and forces: the head or soul stand for the sovereign, the blood for the will of people, the nerves for the system of rewards and punishments. (Bordo 1994, 21)

[33] Despite the Anglo-American misreading of New French Feminisms which mis-translates *écriture féminine* as feminine writing, regarding it a prerogative of women, neither Kristeva, nor Cixous or Irigaray monopolize the privilege of subversive, corporeally motivated writing for women. In that sense *feminine* in *écriture féminine* denotes neither sex nor gender but functions as a metaphor for subversivity.



[34] M.C. Escher: *Drawing Hands* (1948)

[35] Liz Stanley also argues that "fiction cannot be separated from fact, both in autobiography, and in lives as they are lived," while she performs an exciting analysis of novels explicitly exploring the fiction/auto/biography conjunction. (For her interpretations of Julian Barnes' *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984), Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1977), Alison Lurie's *The Truth about Lorin Jones* (1988) and Jan Clausen's *The Prosperine Papers* (1988) see „Fictions and Lives" in Stanley 1992, 59-88)

[36] Besides the truth-criterion of the *autobiographical pact* the *autobiografictions* abolish other fundamental Lejeunian autobiography definitions as well. In their case, it is not valid that "the autobiography does not have grades: it either is or is not it [an autobiography]." (Lejeune 2003, 28) It is not valid that "the autobiography is not a riddle but precisely the reverse: it does not proclaim to flirtatiously let readers guess or find out" (Lejeune 2003, 28). It is not valid that "the autobiography is not simply a charming narrative in which we cleverly recall our memories(: autobiography primarily must try to express the deep unity of a life, to declare its very meaning by obeying the often contradictory rules of coherence and sincerity") (Lejeune 2003, 246) (*translations mine*).

[37] We cannot say "the most sincere comments" since the point is precisely that the narrator Dora keeps her readers in constant uncertainty concerning the truth-value of her confessions.

[38] This idea has been inpired by Professor Francis Marmande's fascinating course on Georges Bataille in 1999-2000 at the Université Paris 7 Sorbonne.

[39] Nevertheless, many feminist theoreticians, like Liz Stanley, suggest that the postmodern idea of the death of the author was articulated in the 1960s by white middle class male first world elite intellectuals with the aim the delimit the newly gained authorial- and alternative authoritative potential of the emerging anti-colonialist-, black-, women-, and gay movements. (Stanley 1992, 17)

[40] Poststructuralist narratology implies a theory and practice of the narrative that intertwines the study of formal and historical aspects, being influenced by deconstruction, psychoanalysis and feminism alike.

[41] While Mark Currie in his *Postmodern Narrative Theory* views humans as narrative animals, as *homo fabulans*, the tellers and interpreters of narrative, Vilmos Keszeg argues that humans, from the very beginnings, differ from other species due to their inclination to story-telling, to talking with fellow human beings not only for the sake of communicating information, or giving orders but telling narratives, as a narrative is a means of mediating between historical reality and the personal world-experience, of attributing meanings to actions and events, and rendering coherence to individual and communal life. (Currie 1998, 2, Keszeg in Kibédi Varga 2005, 79)

[42] A condensed version of this chapter presented at a 2005 conference in Salzburg is to be published as "Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve*: Grotesque Body Modification, Freaked Femininity and Narrative Self-Decomposition" in the forthcoming volume *Fantastic Body Transformations in English Literature* edited by Sabine Coelsch-Foisner and Wolfgang Görtschacher

[43] Orbán János Dénes: "Don Quijote második szerenádja" ("Don Quixote's Second Serenade") <http://orbanjanosdenes.adatbank.transindex.ro/belso.php?k=12&p=285> in: *Hivatalnok-líra*. Erdélyi Híradó, 1999.

[44] All parenthesised page references are to this edition: Angela Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*. London: Virago, 1998.

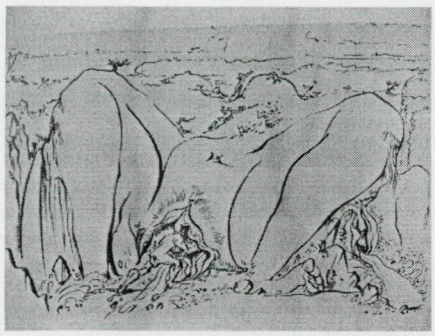
[45] This part of my study (second part, chapter II and III) has been published as "Fantastic Freakings: Decomposing Narrative and Deformed Femininity in Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve*." *Palimpszeszt. Mese és fantasztikus irodalom tematikus szám*. Budapest: ELTE, BTK. 2005. június/ 24.szám. <http://magyar-irodalom.elte.hu/palimpszeszt/24_szam/09.html>

[46] "You were the memory of grief and I fell in love with you the minute I saw you, though I was a woman and you were a woman and, at a conservative estimate, old enough to be my mother." (123)

[47] On a general theory of women's being screens upon which masculine libidinal- and primarily death drives are projected see Elizabeth Bronfen's *Over her Dead Body. Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1992., on the actualization of this feminist psychoanalytical theory concerning Carter's work see Jean Wyatt, "The Violence of Gendering: Castration Images in Angela Carter's *The Magic Toyshop*, *The Passion of New Eve*, and 'Peter and the Wolf'" In Lindsay Tucker. Ed. *Critical Essays on the Art of Angela Carter*. New York: Macmillan, 1998. 60-83.

[48] On feminist geography see Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time, and Perversion. Essays on the Politics of Bodies* New York: Routledge, 1995 and Jürgen Kleist, Bruce Butterfield, eds. *Re-naming the Landscape*. New York: Peter Lang, 1994.

Feminist geographical thought might try to re-cycle, to re-write the Greek philosophies' arche-oppositions posited between *techné* and time connoted as male, versus *physis* and space connoted as female, dualisms which basically determine our Western ways of thinking. (see Jardine 1989, 24)

[49]  A prominent example for the patriarchal mapping of the female body as a landscape waiting to be penetrated, conquered and tamed: André Masson's *Terre Érotique*, 1939

[50] In a remarkable piece of contemporary women's popular literature, a pioneer of "singleton fiction" or even of "thinnist fiction" (an easily markeatable, easily digestable 'light' genre for thirty-something, single, diet-obsessed female readership), Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones' Diary* also reformulates ironically the female body's traditional, mythical identification with land(scapes) to be conquered and meticulously controlled. Although Fielding is often criticised for describing her heroine with the traditional feminine characteristics, and for repeating the conventional family romance plot, *Bridget Jones' Diary* can also be read as an ironic feminist novel. It reveals that the feminized subject internalizes the patriarchal prescriptions of femininity to such an extent that she identifies with the very male farmer controlling, ordering her body, and it suggests that the un-tamed, un-disciplined female body risks a grotesque masculinization of herself by losing all her attributes of femininity. „Being a woman is worse than being a farmer – there is so much harvesting and crop spraying to be done: legs to be waxed, underarms to be shaved, eyebrows plucked, feet pumiced, skin exfoliated and moisturized, spots cleansed, roots dyed, eyelashes tinted, nails filed, cellulite massaged, stomach muscles exercised. The whole performance is so highly tuned you only need to neglect it for a few days for the whole thing to go to seed. Sometimes I wonder what I would be like if left to revert to nature – with a full beard and a handlebar moustache on each shin" (30)

[51] In Irigaray's *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974), the narcissistic and masculine activity of mirroring serves to penetrate, inspect, and objectify the female body and its cavities (cf. Speculum being the gynaecologist's concave mirror). Mirrors are the female's enforced role, denying the existence of women but as a foil for masculine self-absorption. Yet, the speculum has the potential to intensively turn light inward, to eradicate the masculine subject. (Trans. Gillian C Gill. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985.) On the cave parable see Plato's *The Republic*. (Trans. Benjamin Jowett. Available: www.literaturepage.com/read/therepublic.html), on the mirror stage see Lacan, Jacques. "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience." Trans. Alan Sharidan. *Modern Literary Theory. A reader.* Eds. Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh. London: Edward Arnold, 1992. , on simulacrous illusionary images standing in for reality see Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra." *Simulacra and simulation.* Trans. Sheila Faria Glaser. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1994. 1-43.

[52] *The Newly Born Woman* is the title of Hélène Cixous' famous 1975 feminist theoretical study, while 'the iron maiden of perfect femininity' is a metaphor widely used by feminist sociologist Naomi Wolf in her *The Beauty Myth* published in 1991.

[53] In *The Sadeian Woman* Carter does indeed enact a pioneer of feminist geography as she provides an ironic, demythologizing, gender-political re-reading of traditionally feminized landscapes: "The missionary position has another great asset, from the mythic point of view, it implies a system of relations between the partners that equates the woman to the passive receptivity of the soil, to the richness and fecundity of the earth. A whole range of images poeticises, kitschifies, departicularises intercourse, such as wind beating down corn, rain driving against bending trees, towers falling, all tributes to the freedom and strength of the roving, fecundating, irresistible male principle and the heavy, downward, equally irresistible gravity of the receptive soil. The soil that is, good heavens, myself. It is a most self-enhancing notion, I have almost seduced myself with it. Any woman may manage, in luxurious self-deceit, to feel herself for a little while one with great, creating nature, fertile, open, pulsing, anonymous and so forth. In doing so, she loses herself completely and loses her partner also." (Carter 1978, 8)

54 

Examples for the 'contemporary American female grotesque:' normatively ideal, anatomically deformed Barbie dolls, baby beauty queens, an obese society of fast food junkies, female body builder Bev Francis, plastic surgery-addict Jocelyne Wildenstein, supermodels with 'vocational disease' of pathological eating disorders

[55] On positive masculine reception of *PNE* as a comic text see Ward Jouve's account on her son's reading the novel (Ward Jouve 1994).

[56] The term "transgender literature" is likely to enter the literary theoretical canon as the American Literature Association's 2005 conference in Boston presents a panel on transgender literature inviting presentations on gender- bending, -blending, -changing, -exploring, -critiquing and -defying. (see *Literary Call for Papers:* CFP@english.upenn.edu)

[57] "I had become almost the thing I was" (107)

[58] "Tiny and Apple Pie had grasped *his* arms, though *he* showed no signs of running away *herself, he* was too dazed." (137) "So *he, she* was lifted as on a wire, the mimic flight of the theatre, from the tomb *she*'d made for *herself, he* looked about *him* with the curiosity of Lazarus." (143)

[59] "Alone, quite alone, in the heart of that gigantic metaphor for sterility, where our child was conceived on the star-spangled banner, yet we peopled this immemorial loneliness with all we had been, or might be, or had dreamed of being, or had thought we were—every modulation of the selves we now projected upon each other's flesh, selves—aspects of being, ideas—that seemed, during our embraces, to be the very essence of our selves, the concentrated essence of being, as if, out of these fathomless kisses and our interpenetrating, undifferentiated sex, we had made the great Platonic hermaphrodite together, the whole and perfect being to which he, with an absurd and touching heroism, had, in his own single self aspired, we brought into being the being who stops time in the self-created eternity of lovers." (148)

[60] On androgyns see Plato's *Symposium* (Platón, *A lakoma*. Budapest: Helikon, 1961), on hermaphrodites see Herculine Barbin's memoirs presented by Foucault (Michel Foucault, ed. *Herculine Barbin, más néven Alexina B*. Trans. Zsuzsa Lóránt. Budapest: Jószöveg, 1997.), and Balzac's hero/ine Zambinella widely discussed by Barthes (Honoré de Balzac, "Sarassine." In Roland Barthes. *S/Z*. Budapest: Osiris, 1997. 275-319.)

[61] Dynamic polyphony, heterogeneous intertextuality, subjectivity and semiosis in crisis, the novel as polylogue, subject/meaning in process/on trial are Kristevian concepts inspired by Bakhtin's notions of dialogism, carnival and polyphony. (Kristeva 1980, 1985)

[62] An extended version of this part of my chapter has been accepted for publication as "Narrating the nervous, bulimic body-text in Angela Carter's Passion of New Eve" in Gender Studies Journal. Ed. Reghina Dascal. West University of Timisoara: Interdisciplinary Center of Gender Studies, 2006. forthcoming.

[63] As the intimate friend Lorna Sage writes on Carter: "Being young was traumatic, she had been anorexic, her tall, big-boned body and intransigent spirit had been at odds with the way women were expected to be, inside or outside." (Sage 1994a, 24)

[64] See especially the articles entitled "Whose Body is This? Feminism, Medicine, and the Conceptualization of Eating Disorders," "Hunger as Ideology," "Anorexia Nervosa: Psychopathology as the Crystallization of Culture," "The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity," and "Reading the Slender Body" in Susan Bordo's *Unbearable Weight Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Los Angeles: California UP, 1993).

[65] According to Bordo, the bulimic body-politics also reflects, besides the politics of gender, the unstable double bind of consumer capitalism's oscillation between consumption and production, non-productive expenditure and accumulative restraint, desire and its controlling containment (Bordo 1993, 199).

[66] Tom Paulin reproaches Carter's writing for "an easy fluency and soft stylishness" "won at the expense of form and mimesis" and producing "an expansive territory without boundaries or horizons, a kind of permanent and infinite vanishing" (Tom Paulin. "In an English Market." *London Review of Books*, 3-17 March 1983, 19.) (Paulin 19 in Bristow-Broughton 6)

[67] Carter's "Flesh and the Mirror" is a perfect illustration of the irrational attitude to/of mirrors, as the ambiguous mirror in the short-story is seductive, accomplice or delusive, projects appearances, annihilates time, place and persons, creates a glass between the self and the world, or enables an epiphany. (Carter 1995, 68-75) As Mary Russo claims, "The ambiguity of the mirror in this story is that it provides, on the one hand, a possible identity, and that, on the other, it binds the heroine to the mirror as flesh to image so that real experience takes place "elsewhere," when a sin blindness or a kind of death, she is not able to look." (Russo 1995, 163)

[68] In her *Come Unto these Yellow Sands* Carter herself claims that a "narrative is an argument stated in fictional terms" (Carter 1985, 13).

[69] Umberto Eco, *Diario minimo*, Milano: Mondadori, 1976 quoted in De Lauretis 1987, 53, in her translation.

[70] "I'm no angel, but I've spread my wings a bit" is Mae West's line in 1933 film *I'm No Angel* directed by Wesley Ruggles.

[71] All parenthesised page references are to this edition: Angela Carter, *Nights at the Circus.* London: Vintage, 1994.

[72] An earlier and more condensed version of this part of my study (first part, first chapter) has been published as "Wings and Masks. Grotesque Body, Laughing Language and Carnivalesque Texture in Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus." in: Spaces in Transition. Papers in English and American Studies XII.* Ed. Erzsébet Barát. Szeged: JATEPress, 2005. 46-60.

[73] The knowing yet familiar tone of the recurring allusions to the canonized master, Shakespeare signifies an *hommage* to the vulgar yet poetic language of the dearly loved Bard—a tribute that will peak in *WC*—that also reveals the *carnivalesque grotesque* relativity of high and low, of valuable and worthless. (Like in the sentence, "we were just a hop and a skip and a jump away from the good Old Vic at Waterloo where, at very reasonable prices, we perched up in the gods and wept at Romeo and Juliet, booed and hissed at Crookback Dick, laughed ourselves silly at Malvolio's yellow stocking" (53))

[74] See also quotations on Fevvers' eyes, voice, wings, etc.

[75] It seems as if Fevvers' narrative was embraced by her "simmering wake of [...] hair [...], a sufficiently startling head of hair, yellow and inexhaustible as sand, thick as cream, sizzling and whispering under the brush [while] Fevvers sighed with pleasure" (19)

[76] "Then she spread out her superb, heavy arms in a backward gesture of benediction and, as she did so, her wings spread, too, a polychromatic unfolding fully six feet across, spread of an eagle, a condor, an albatross fed to excess on the same diet that makes flamingoes pink. OOOOOOOh! The gasps of the beholders sent a wind of wonder rippling through the theatre." (15)

[77] As for the other characters' literalized metaphors, the tiger-tamer Princess of Abyssinia never says a word as if cat got her tongue (149), when she meets Mignon, they become forever singing lovebirds, the clowns really put a brave face on behaving in a happy, cheerful way when they are dreadfully disappointed.

[78] As for the 'male grotesque' characters and their languages, the Uncle Sam-like, fat Colonel Kearney in his trademark costume in the colors of the American flag and a dollar signed belt, with a twitching eye, a "full, buoyant, excited heart" and a habit of spreading sensationalist 'self-gossip' can never be separated from his "porcine assistant" in the "Ludic Game," Sybil, the pig who nudges out Walser's future profession in the circus with the help of "dog-eared, grease-stained alphabet cards" (101) spelling C-L-O-W-N. Grik and Grok, the pair of unseparable musical clowns, old troupers, always together, the Darby and Joan of the clowns" (122), "nearest and dearest Siamese twins" claim "'...without Grik, Grok is a lost syllable, a typo on a programme, a sign-painter's hiccup on a billboard--'--and so is he *sans* me...'" (123), so that they transform the split self into a doubled self that transcends binary oppositions, and turns every monologue dialogic by "contain(ing) within them an entire orchestra" (117).

[79] This second chapter of the first part of my study has been published as "Corporeal and Textual Performance as Ironic Confidence Trick in Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*" in *The AnaChronisT.* Budapest: ELTE, School of English and American Studies. 2004/Vol. 10. 97-125.

[80] Fevvers' (self)irony substitutes the anxiety of Rivière's female hysteric. Although her performance places her in a (subversive) power position, Fevvers, contradicting Rivière's argumentation, never seems to exhibit herself in possession of the Father's penis, having castrated him, seeking protection from anger and anxiety by offering herself as castrated woman. She rather seems to transgress the phallogocentric representational logic by her unlimited, constant change. (see Rivière 1989)

[81] "She batted her eyelids like a flirt. She lowered her voice to a whisper… her breath flavoured with champagne, warmed his cheek 'I dye sir!' 'What?' 'My feathers, sir! I dye them!" (25).

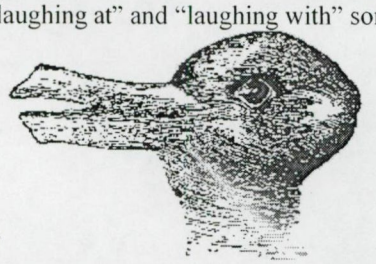
[82] The "beauty myth," described by Naomi Wolf, is particularly prevalent in contemporary, capitalist, consumer societies of spectacle. The dictates of the image of the beautiful female body embody a fundamental paradox: woman's body painfully disciplined by the economic interests of beauty industry as well as patriarchal representations, tortured by diet, fitness, cosmetics, fashion regimes and plastic surgery is an ascetic body that is represented as an erotic body full of pleasure. Similarly, the aestheticisation of the immaculate (thus) feminine body coincides with the pathologisation of the abject female corporeality (pregnancy, menstruation, menopause) symbolising in the collective unconscious—as Elizabeth Bronfen highlights—death and decay (Bronfen 1992). (On the violent ideological body-discipline of beauty myth see Kérchy 2004).

[83] For an elaboration of the concept of bifocal vision in connection with feminine/feminist re-reading, re-writing and re-vision within the larger frame of contemporary women's writing in English see my study: "Nõies-e a kortárs női irodalom? Átírás, újraolvasás, re-vízió" *Laikus olvasók? A nem-professzionális olvasás értelmezési lehetõségei* . ("Is contemporary women's writing feminine? Re-writing, re-reading, re-vision." *Lay readership? Interpretive possibilities of non-professional reading.*) Eds. Zsófia Lóránd –Tamás Scheibner –Gábor Vaderna. (Dayka Series 4t[h] volume)Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2005.

[84] Carter claims in her *Notes from the Front Line* "I'm in the demythologizing business. (71) "I am all for putting new wine in old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottles explode." (Carter 1983, 69)

[85] An excellent example for the ideological technology of gender underlying literary canonization is Ifor Evans' *Short History of English Literature*--reprinted sixteen times up to 1970—in which Mrs Ann Radcliff is referred to as combining terror "with *sentiment* and with *sentimental* but effective descriptions," Emily Bronte is "*passionate*" with an "*inner* activity," Charlotte Bronte narrates her "*imagined romantic* experience" in a "work grounded in realism but going beyond into *wish-fulfilment*," George Eliot appears as "*melodramatic*," Fanny Burney has a "*gargantuan syntax*," while Virginia Woolf is "armed with an *acute intelligence* and *sensibility*, she suffused every evanescent mood with a *romantic* quality that added to the *buoyancy* of the narration" (224, 227, 245, 247, 275).(*emphasis mine*)

[86] In her article on the parody of the female gothic, Marinovich-Resch associates the crude caricature with Bakhtin and connects the liberatory parody to Hutcheon, however, as I argued in my study, the Bakhtinian carnivalesque ridicule also has its subversive potentials, while Hutcheon's concept of the parody seems in some sense limiting, and much more uninvolved, impersonal and cruel as opposed to irony per se. In the third part of my analysis I will differentiate between the various kinds of laughter, tracing the complex relationship of "laughing at" and "laughing with" someone else or oneself.



[87] The duck-rabbit illusion 'originally noted' in 1899 by American psychologist Joseph Jastrow

[88] In my reading, Abraham A Moles' idea on kitsch originating in repressed erotic desire, and Carter's claiming that "a sentimental transformation turned the denial of lust into a kitsch admiration of the cute"(Carter 1978, 60) also underline the sexist ideology of genre-formation.

[89] Recurring kitsch architectural elements--as the Alhambra music hall's "plaster cherubs" (14), „a brace of buxom, smiling goddesses support[ing the] mantelpiece on the flats of their upraised palms" (26) in Ma Nelson's brothel, Rosencreutz's fake Gothic mansion, antique in design but newly executed, with "fresh brass plates hammered in to simulate studs" (74), the Grand Duke's mansion with the "couple of capripede caryatids" looking after the door crowned by a coat of arms (184), the Circus' huge elephant pillar statues, "who uphold the show upon the princely domes of their foreheads" (105)--provide an adequate setting for Fevvers' (mock)feminine spectacles. (Yet, ironically, the somptuous, ten-foot stone elephant caryatids are splashed all over with pigeon droppings.)

[90] According to Foucault, hysterical patients "invent, exaggerate, and repeat all the various absurdities of which a disordered imagination is capable" (Foucault 1965, 139) in: *Madness and Civilization. A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, (1961.) New York: Random House, 1965.

[91] "Infection in the sentence breeds" is a line from Emily Dickinson (see Dickinson 1994), and the title of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's article on the woman writer and the anxiety of authorship (Gilbert-Gubar 1991)

[92] ...her cavernous, sombre voice, a voice made for shouting about the tempest, her voice of a celestial fishwife. Musical as it strangely was, yet not a voice for singing with, it comprised discords, her scale contained twelve tones. Her voice, with its warped, homely, Cockney vowels and random aspirates. Her dark, rusty, dipping, swooping voice, imperious as a siren's. Yet such a voice could almost have had its source not within her throat but in some ingenious mechanism or other behind the canvas screen, voice of a fake medium at a seance. (43)

[93] In her "Up There, Out There. Aerialism, the Grotesque and Critical Practice" Mary Russo identifies Kristeva's nonsignified space of the semiotic *chora* with Sandor Ferenczi's thrilling and regressive *thalassal* environment and Michail Balint's *philobatism*, a friendly thrill of feeling the self-supported human body in space, focusing on the latter concept in its relation to female acrobats, flying and falling women (Russo 1994, 17-51).

[94] "The essence of the carnival, the festival, the Feast of Fools, is transience. It is here today, and gone tomorrow, a release of tension not a reconstitution of order, a refreshment...after which everything can go again exactly as if nothing had happened." (from "In Pantoland" in *American Ghosts and Old World Wonders* in Carter 1995, 389)

[95] Perhaps it is not too far-fetched to regard Carter's texts as fibres in the intertextual web of a continuous corpus, and to claim that *The Sadeian Woman,* Carter's polemical theoretical treaty on pornography may be read in parallel with a succeeding novel, *NC*, given that Carter herself claims that a "narrative is an argument stated in fictional terms" (Carter 1985, 13). Similarly, *The Sadeian Woman* can be--perhaps even more clearly--interfaced with Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*. (see my unpublished TDK study, Anna Kérchy: "The Blissful Story of the Tender Wolf and the Wolfish Red Riding Hood")

[96] 

„The milk bottle joke in Frank Tashlin's fifties movie, *The Girl Can't Help It*, illustrates perfectly this comic degradation. Jayne Mansfield clutches the milk bottles to her mammaries, a crude reminder as to the primary function of these glands—no, they are not orbs of delight, by no means the magic place where Freud, the romantic, thought that love and hunger met...they are farcial globes of fat, and their function is more hygienically superseded by any dairy." (Carter 1978, 69)

[97] At first seeing Fevvers, Walser, unable to get rid of phallogocentric logic, calms himself seeing that the castrating winged giantess is castrated herself, she does not have a tail.

[98] In Magali Cornier Michael's view, Lizzie gives voice to the more sceptic, materialist feminist stance versus Fevvers' utopian feminism. (Cornier Michael 1998, 207-227)

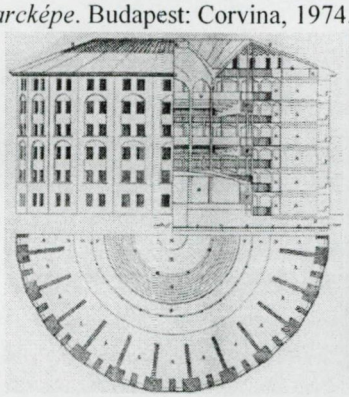
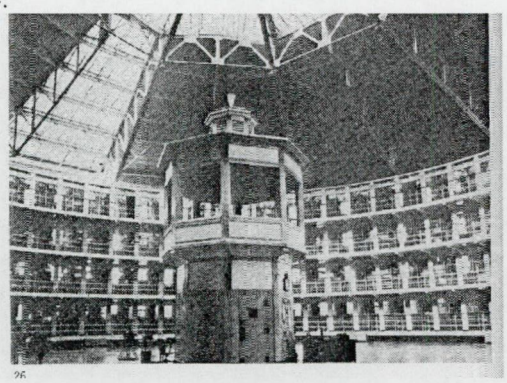
[99] Mary Russo also highlights the similarity between Fevvers and Mae West, noting a parallel between Fevvers' excessive and artificial body-act and Mae West's Hollywood image of a "double bluff dominatrix", a parallel voiced as a clear intertextual homage when Fevvers, looking into her mirror substituting the movie frame, delivers Mae West's famous ling, "Suckers," from *I'm No Angel* (1933), a film featuring a great female impersonator dressed in circus garb as a lion tamer in an imposture of dominance and control. (Russo 1995, 162) Besides West, the novel evokes other great spectacular "pantomime dame" divas enacting femininity: Carter claims having paid a tribute to Marlene Dietrich by making Jack Walser as Human Chicken re-enact, though more positively, a person who runs away with a music hall artiste and is forced to impersonate a rooster in *The Blue Angel*. (Haffenden 90)



1. 2. 3.

1-2. Mae West, 3. Marlene Dietrich

[100] For a differentiation between various types of clowns see Szabolcsi, Miklós. *A clown, mint a művész önarcképe*. Budapest: Corvina, 1974.

101

Philosopher Jeremy Bentham's (1748-1832) Penitentiary Panopticon

[102] „While writing *Nights at the Circus* (1984) Carter became pregnant, and her son, Alexander, was born in November 1983." (Sage 1999, 27)

[103] Although Carter with Marquis de Sade fiercely rejects the institution of motherhood (see Carter 1978) she remains fond of a mothering caring that is also a reoccurring theme enacted by her memorable mother-figure heroines, as foster-mother Lizzie, Ma Nelson, or Grandma Chance.

[104] "Then, perhaps hoping their scent would refresh her, she pulled her violets dripping from the jam-jar and buried her face in them. Perhaps she was tiring? After she'd imbibed whatever virtue she might obtain from her violet, she yawned." (52)

[105] All the protagonists are compared to children at certain points of the novel: while Fevvers owns a toy gilt sword mascot, Walser is "unhatched" and wrapped by Fevvers in a children's patchwork shawl (190, 172).

[106] As for the other children, marginal characters, they are all thrown out of the story on their turn to punctuate the text with gaps destabilizing the conventional, linear narrative flow and 'positivist' plot structure: the high-wire dancer Charivaris' children, eager to see Fevvers drop "to see if she would bounce" (158), suspicious after a murderous attempt against the aerialiste are sent away sacked from the circus, the stable boy teaching Mignon her songs is knocked down by the jealous Ape-Man to be left in some bushes on the side of the road, the childishly incongruous Siberian fireboy of the opera-bandit-like brotherhood of freemen, who is convulsed with mirth by the clowns' aggression and adulates the sublime in Fevvers, is blown back to his village and dear home by the whirlwind sweeping away all clowns.

[107] I think that Alison Lee suggests something very similar to the "snowball" when she describes the "butterfly effect" in *NC*, claiming that in the Carterian text, combining postmodernism with an optimistic chaos theory, "even the smallest cause—reading, for example—may create large effects and a new order can be found in the turbulence of the old" (Lee 107-108).

[108] On the one hand, the narrative, mockingly repeating the sentence "Seeing is believing" (83), aims at giving proofs of its veracity by presenting Fevvers as a friend of "real" persons as Toulouse Lautrec, Alfred Jarry or Colette, or by claiming that a full account of the operation of Madame Shreck's deformed servant, Touissaint may be found in *The Lancet* of June of 1898 (60), while on the other hand, the narrative renders itself utterly unreliable by the overflow of fantasy in episodes like the one where Fevvers escapes from the Grand Duke by dropping a minuscule train from a Faubergé egg onto the ground to see it suddenly transform into Trans-Siberia Express onto which she can mount to join the entire troupe of Colonel Kearney. (Alison Lee calls this latter

scene "the most economical moment of fantasy" that engages readers directly to remind them that "this is indeed fiction" (Lee 95).)

[109] I use the terms of laughter theoreticians, who, like Shultz, refer to tickling and chasing as games, however in the context of the present analysis they are to be understood not so much as rule-bound *games* but more like manifestations of unlimited, infantile *play*.

[110] With a wink it is thought-provoking to note that 1899 when *NC* takes place is the year when the young Chaplin—son of an alcoholic mime (like Buffo) and of a dance-hall girl diagnosed with neurosyphilis known as the "great mimic" (resembling Fevvers)—appears in a clog-dancing act called "eight Lancashire Lads," is engaged at London Hippodrome as the most popular child actor of England, and launches his career that leads from joining the circus as a mime in Karno's Pantomime Troupe (like Buffo in the homonimously named Colonel *Kearney*'s troupe) to become the Tramp, Chaplin, the star, proud of his working class, Cockney origins and sexually liberated lifestyle (like Fevvers) and to reach the peaks with his first feature-length comedy masterpiece, *The Kid* (1920), an unconscious autobiography of Charlie, the Kid, and a film of frenetic laughters, the most famous burlesque of all times and a promising yet highly neglected intertext of *NC*, a text moved by the careless merriment of children. (For an analysis of Chaplin's mother's neurosyphilis, known as "the great mimic" for imitating other physical and mental symptoms, see Weissman's article on Chaplin's heroines. Also see Weissman's reading of *The Kid* as Chaplin's unconscious autobiography, hiding and revealing Charlie, the fatherless kid and Chaplin, the childless father simultaneously, as well as Eisenstein's brilliant article on "Charlie, the Kid".)

[111] A major characteristic of the critical writing on Carter is that no critics ever forget to highlight the extreme richness, the intellectual charge and the interpretive possibilities of Carter's intertextual allusions: the repeatedly mentioned, ever-expanding list embraces a wide variety of names ranging from Colette, Buñuel, De Sade and Godard, to Swift, Blake, Yates, Shelley, Poe, Lewis Carroll, Bram Stoker, to Marquez, Calvino and Hoffman among others, yet noone has ever remarked so far the Chaplinian-Carterian intertextual parallel, which thus could be the object of promising further analysis.

[112] Via its embedded childish laughters and infantile plays the functioning of the text models what laughter theoreticians call *symbolic play*, and thus succeeds in subverting symbolic representation to produce a play of 'other' laughing languages beyond the comic narrative. The Carterian text goes against/beyond representation by evoking primary laughters, the first emergence of infantile humour embodied by *symbolic play*, where the child of 18-24 months reproduces a sensory motor scheme outside its normal context, in the absence of its usual objective, applied to an inappropriate object to create in this deferred imitation the possibility of a self-constructed, unresolved incongruity that incites a childish laughter. This infantile laughter differs from its adult counterpart in two ways. On the one hand, it contradicts the resolved, rational, socially structured, formalized, consensual nature of 'mature' jokes and wits. On the other hand, the pure non-sense constituting the source of infantile humour always has—according to Mérei and Binét's arguments—an arbitrary, changing, private, ephemeral sense (or series of senses), a real *meaning-in-process* in play, that contradicts consensual meaning and sign systems, as well as the conventional dichotomy of meaning and meaninglessness. Fusing symbolization and play into one, the (il)logic of the erupting childish laughter surpasses the limits of conventional narrative, meaning formation and representation. As I have tried to demonstrate, *NC*, like symbolic play, considerably builds on self-constructed incongruity (in the form of the self-freakings), on the possibility of pretence and deferred imitation (by being a spectacular, performative, ironic, multi-faceted text), on pure nonsense (via magical realism) and on the mocking stagings of laughters, that of clowns' and the aerialiste's, which hide beneath a third laughter, that of children, modelling their very own functioning in and beyond the text.

[113] "A vamp nem magyarázkodik, nem néz kérdően a jegyszedő fiúra: 'itt van jegyem félretéve, kérem?' A vamp jön, feltartóztathatatlanul. Megjelen. Nyomot hagy maga után. Olvas, ír. Legfőképpen ír."

[114] All parenthesised page references are to this edition: Angela Carter, *Wise Children*. New York: Penguin, 1993.

[115] Carter provides an ingenious (re)interpretation of Marlene Dietrich's *The Blue Angel*, reading the film 'against the grain', and disagreeing with the majority of critics who regard the heroine Lola Lola a stereotypical man-eater *femme fatale* figure, when she describes Lola from a female spectatorial perspective as an „attractive, unimaginative cabaret singer, who marries a boring old fart in a fit of weakness, lives to regret it but is too soft-hearted to actually throw him out until his sulks, tantrums and idleness become intolerable" (Carter 1982, 122)

116 

[117] For a feminist re-interpretation of the fetish-femme fatale relationship in an analysis of Helmut Newton's photos see my study entitled "Helmut Newton és a tűsarok" ("Helmut Newton and High Heels") in *A Hét*. Marosvásárhely, 23 January 2006.. IV/3. 18.

[118] The seducing quality of the 'simulating sign taking over reality' that prevails in *Seduction* (published in 1979) undergoes a gradual transformation in Baudrillard's work so that in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981) and even more so in *America* (1986) or in *The Transparency of Evil* (1990) and in recent works characterized by a growing pragmatic, political, ideology-critical awareness the simulacra of our virtual reality becomes associated with disillusion, despondency and impassibility.

[119] In Julia Kristeva's "Hérétique de l'amour" (1974, translated into English as "Stabat Mater" in 1983) the repressed other, mother and materiality revealed and accepted in the self provokes a discursive crisis, a catastrophe of identity as well as a heretics of love, meaning an unconditional, maternal love that embraces the other to herself as if it was a fetus constituting an integral part of her own body. Luce Irigaray's "Passions élémentaires" (1982) suggests something very similar by claiming that the maternal creativity, the passionate bliss-writing of the desiring female body outlines an active female subjectivity where my love and the love of myself abolishes the distinction between "I" and "you," between "man" and "woman," and guides towards a ethics of passion, the passionate "ethics of sexual difference."

[120] Like Prioleau, Baudrillard praises the seductress as the feminist incarnate recovering women's natural supremacy and the feminine's being the only sex, yet I would not claim that his *Seduction* suggests a feminist ethics, as his study is neither feminist nor ethical in its overall effect, because, in my view, he tends to fetishize the Seductress, turned into a key signifier of his system of simulacra, on the basis of her "natural" biological attributes (like her capacity of unlimited orgasm, her standing on the same side as madness) and he remains uniquely on a theoretical, sort of utopian, apolitical level, neglecting the material stakes and consequences of being ideologically engendered or subversively effaced, un-gendered as a seductress.

[121] For an overview of various feminist theories on spectatorship and the gaze as well as a practical try-out of their viability see my article "On the possibilities of the female gaze in Jane Campion's film, *The Piano*" in *Filmtett. Feminizmus és filmelmélet szám*. Kolozsvár: Interprint, 2003. 11-15.

[122] De Lauretis complex essay "Desire in Narrative" illustrates her argument "Story demands sadism" (playing on Mulvey's line "Sadism demands a story") with numerous examples, analysing a wide range of narratives ranging from the classical mythological story of Oedipus, to Freud's case studies on hysteria and essays on femininity, Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*, Barthes's *Plesaure of the Text*, Lotman's semiotic's narrative typology, Lévi-Strauss's cultural-anthropological reading of shamanistic practices, Victor Turner's social dramas, and Hayden White's historiography, to Pauline Réage's *Histoire d'O* and Hitchcock's *Rebecca* and *Vertigo*. (De Lauretis 1984, 103-158)

[123] For an analysis of the freak as a psychical, physical, conceptual limit of human subjectivity see Elizabeth Grosz's "Intolerable Ambiguity: Freaks as/at the Limit" in Thomson 1996, 55-69.

[124] "For a woman, making a spectacle out of herself had more to do with a kind of inadvertency and loss of boundaries: the possessors of large, aging and dimpled thighs displayed at the public beach, of overtly rouged cheeks, of a voice shrill in laughter, or of a sliding bra strap—a loose dingy bra strap especially—were at once caught out by fate and blameworthy." (Russo 53)

[125] " 'How long has it been Dora?' 'Too long, me old cock!' I responded heartily, though, rack my brains as I might, I couldn't for the life of me remember sleeping with him before and I shocked myself, to have forgotten

that—if I had forgotten, that is, and if he wasn't making a general rather than a particular enquiry, but it wasn't the time nor place to ask him to elucidate, was it? All the same, to have forgotten so much else, so many other names, yes, all water under the bridge—but to have forgotten whether I ever slept with my beloved Perry…and then I thought, perhaps, he can't remember either. But, even so. But don't think I thought these thoughts in a reasoned sequence and a coherent manner. Far from it. You never forget the first time. I'll never forget the last time, either." (219)

[126] Donna Haraway provides an overall critique of patriarchal scientific discourse, she condemns its masculinized voice, its silencing, domineering, marginalising strategies, its logic of hierarchical binaries, its claims to universality, its pretence of objectivity and its aspirations at authenticity. She also rejects extreme liberal over-relativization. Instead, she proposes to introduce a new, "feminist objectivity," built on *partial perspective, limited location, situated knowledges,* and self-consciously subjective but critical standpoints, which also constitute the basis of her feminist ethics primarily focused on solidarity and care. (Haraway 1996)

[127] In Baudrillard's view, while *trompe l'oeil* seduces by "remov[ing] a dimension from real space," pornography loses its seductive powers by *adding* an extra-dimension to the space of sex (Baudrillard 1990, 28)..

[128] Sarah Gamble calls the novel a "family saga in the best tradition of soap opera" (Gamble 1997, 169).

[129] Dora's narrative disputes her maternal origin as well when she considers the possibility of Pretty Kitty's being a "romantic tale" and their being the fruits of Grandma Chance's "last fling" with Peregrine. On the other hand, the baby twins appearing at the end of the novel are offsprings of Garreth and an anonymous, unknown mother.

[130] Ranulph: "All the same, he loved his boys. He cast them as princes in the tower as soon as they could toddle" (17) Peregrine: "…our Uncle Perry did possess a fault. One single fault. It was his boredom threshold. …For him life had to be a continuous succession of small treats or else he couldn't see the point" (61)

[131] "But then, again, a person isn't flesh of its father's flesh, is it? One little sperm out of a millions swims up the cervix and it is so very, very easy to forget how it has happened" (174)

[132] The invented family "adopts" the working-class Brenda, the aristocratic Lady Atalanta Wheelchair, the black Tiffany, and Daisy's mongrel she-cat on heat alike, while both Grandma Chance and the pair of Dora and Nora taking her place will fulfil both maternal and paternal functions.

[133] According to a feminist interpretation, Dora's hysterical symptoms (primarily nervous coughs) are caused by a variety of patriarchy's normalized sexist, misogynist manipulations of women, which she must suffer from in her everyday life and which are repeatedly enacted throughout her analysis by Freud. Dora believes to be reduced to an object of exchange between men, when she fears that her father passes her on to his friend, Herr K in exchange for Frau K who becomes the father's lover, and then repeats this betrayal by passing her on to Freud in exchange for her 'correction', normalization. In his case study, Freud--playing detective, archaeologist, code-breaker, prophet and saviour at once--provides various misinterpretations of Dora's psychosomatic *tussis nervosa*, decoding it as a displacement of a past sexual excitement the 14 years old Dora experienced when she felt on her thighs the pressure of the erect penis of Herr K trying to kiss her, as a re-enactment of the fellatio, the presumed oral pleasures between the impotent father and the adulterous Frau K, as an oral fixation, as a desire to be kissed by the father, as a desire to be kissed by Herr K, as a desire to be kissed by Frau K. It never occurs to Freud that perhaps Dora wishes to become a kiss-giver herself, or perhaps she does not want to be kissed at all. Dora is categorized as a neurotic because she trespasses the heteronormative, reproductive, patriarchal scenario by refusing to return the kiss of Herr K, and instead of sexual arousal feeling repulsion, fear or outrage. As a final violence on the part of the analyst, Freud decides to disbelieve Dora on the whole, and aggressively imposes his story upon her life, her body, claiming that the traumatizing sexually-charged experiences (Herr K's kiss and advances, the father's caresses, Frau K's lechery) were not real events, but only fantasies of Dora's wishful thinking and repressed desires. This marks a turning point in Freud's theory, whereby he exchanges his seduction theory (in which the father actually attempts to seduce the daughter) to his scenario of Oedipalization (in which the daughter's devaluation takes place in three steps: the daughter seducing the father gives her place to the daughter secretly, passively aspiring to be seduced by the father, and then is replaced by the son, the male child who becomes the protagonist of the parable that is destined to represent the functioning of the desiring of all human beings, regardless of gender, through a story in which the universalized subject's socialisation peaks in his transforming his envious hatred of the father for an identification with the father as bearer of the phallus, while his desire of the mother is displaced onto women who--according to the normative Freudian scenario—now, from their minor, supporting, 'castrated' role, willingly exhibit, objectify, subordinate, victimize themselves with the sole aim of fulfilling *his* desires. (see Freud 1993, Frank 1989)

[134] In fact, Gilligan does indeed quote Ibsen's *A Doll's House* as one of the examples to illustrates her idea of women's different moral judgments tied to feeling of empathy, compassion and care. (Gilligan 1982, 68)

[135] On the patriarchal ideological/canonical interpellation/interpretation of womenwriters into devaluated, 'lesser' authorial positions also see Anna Kérchy and Nóra Koller, "'Kisasszonyok, vadmacskák, kékharisnyák' Az író nő pozicionálása a mai magyar médiában." ("'Demoiselles, Wildcats, and Blue Stockings.' Positioning the Writing

Woman in the Contemporary Hungarian Media.") in the forthcoming conference proceedings of *Nyelv, Ideológia, Média. A nő helye a magyar nyelvhasználatban. (Language, Ideology, Media. Woman's Place in Hungarian Discourse)* edited by Erzsébet Barát and Klára Sándor, to be published at JATEPress, Szeged.

[136] For analyses on the "harassing of the muse" in Romantic masterworks see *Romanticism and Feminism* edited by Anne K. Mellor (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1988), especially Karen Swann's "Harassing the Muse" (81-92).

[137] As Elizabeth Grosz underlines, Nietzsche's philosophy locates the primordial, mythical origins of culture in the ability to make promises, to keep one's word, a *will to remember*, dependent on the constitution of social subjectivity, a moral sense, an interiority (self-conscience, superego), which is counterposed with the body's active desire, a *will to forget*, a forgetfulness necessary for "robust health," vigorous self-affirmation, free activity and a sovereign enjoyment of life. Civilization, socialization implies the institution of memory, a renouncement of forgetfulness, as the law is branded upon bodies through the *mnemonics of pain*, a memory fashioned out of the suffering and pain of the body, the skin serving as a reminder of what is not allowed to be forgotten, while the system of justice is codified in terms of the precise value of body organs and intensities of pain. (The cost of an act of forgetfulness, an unkept promise, an unpaid debt is the torment inflicted upon the debtor's body.) (Grosz 1994, 131-134)

[138] While Haraway argues in favour of a feminist epistemology insisting on situated knowledges, partial perspectives and limited locations in her study on the science question in feminism (Haraway 1996), Toril Moi focuses on Freud's Dora's case to celebrate female epistemology and sexuality which succeed in evading aggressive patriarchal attempts at totalitarian totalization, and reject imprisonment within engendering representations or mis-interpretations (Moi 1990).

[139] "Gossip is nothing else but the infinite and confuse dream of innumerable old crones about an encaged, masturbating ape." (translation mine) This is a telling line from the editor's (Péter Bozsik) foreword to *Ex-Symposion*'s, an academic-journal's thematic issue on Gossip. (*Ex-Symposion*. Veszprém. 2001/ 36-37. i.)

[140] *Bricolage* is Lévi-Strauss' term referring to the creation of improvised structures by appropriating the 'debris' of pre-existing materials ready to hand, adopting existing signifieds as signifiers, making choices from limited possibilities. (see Chandler 2003, 18) In: Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics for Beginners* <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/sem09.html>

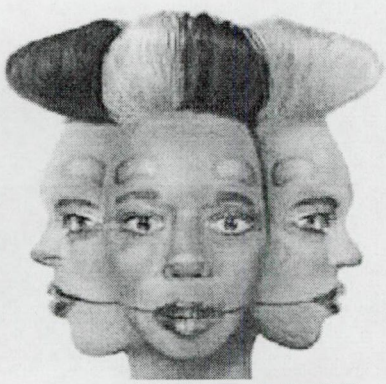
[141] Lines from lyrics of "Creep" from Radiohead's 1994 album, *The Bends*

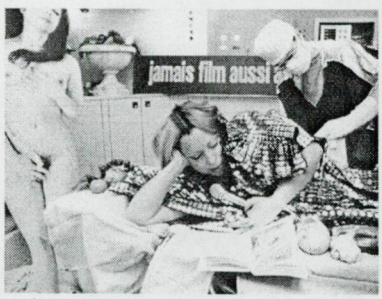
[142] "This is not a story to pass on." is a recurring line of Toni Morrison's *Beloved.*

[143] "I am telling you stories. Trust me." is a recurring line of Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion.*

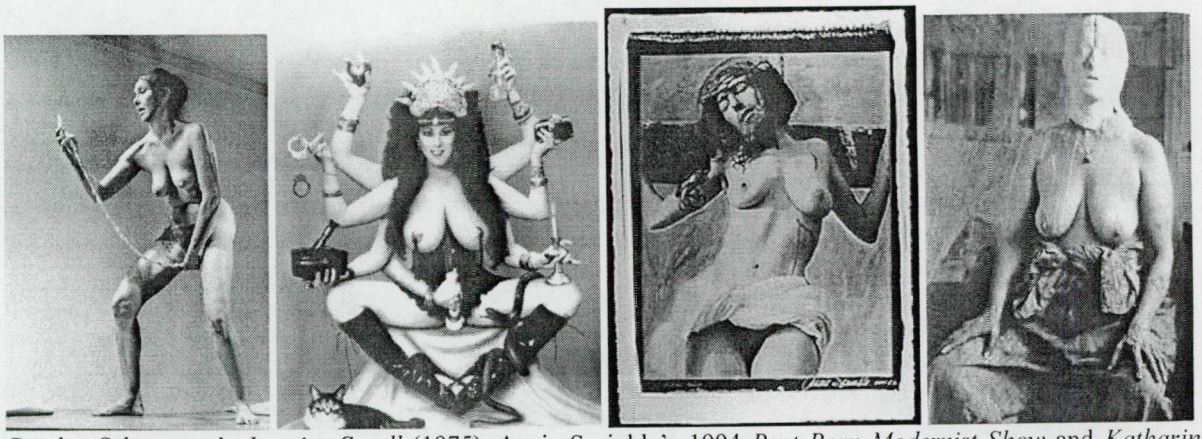
[144] For illustrations of freak femininities in contemporary arts see my studys on Annie Sprinkle, Orlan, Cindy Sherman and feminist carnal performance and body art.

[145]

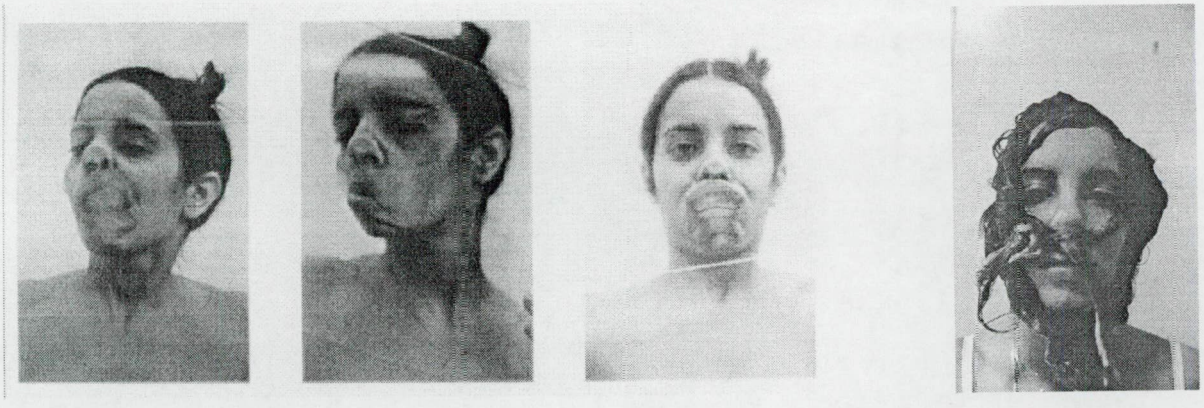




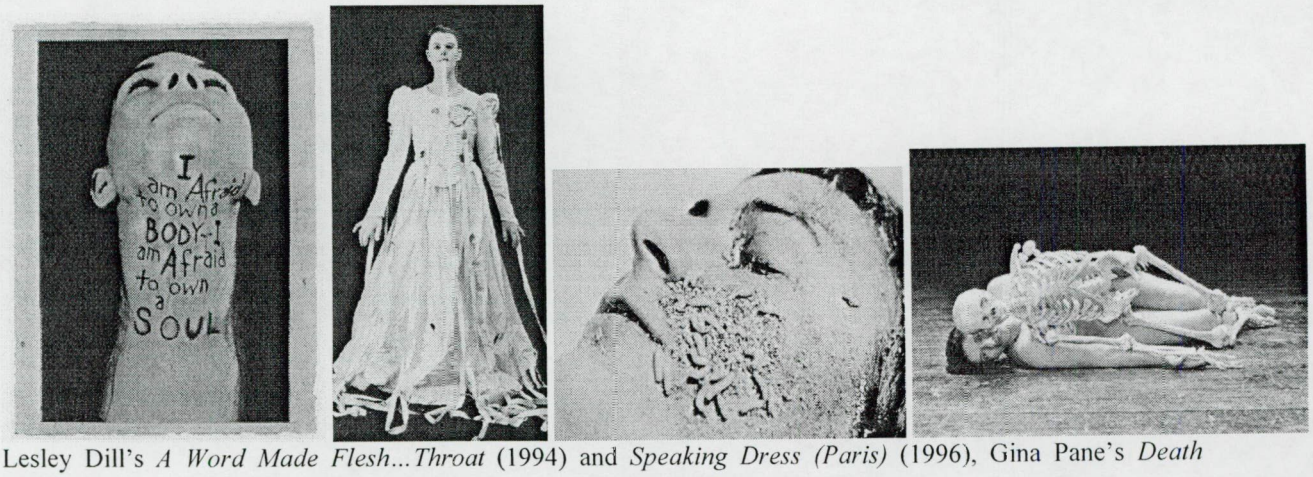
Orlan' s ongoing cosmetic surgical body art project (1987-) presented under the titles: *The Reincarnation of Saint Orlan, Image-New Images, Self-Hybridations, Carnal Art, Identity Alterity, This is My Body—This is My Software, I Have Given My Body to Art, Rites of Passage, Successful Operations*



Carolee Schneeman's *Interior Scroll* (1975), Annie Sprinkle's 1994 *Post Porn Modernist Show* and *Katharine Gates as Jesus* (2001), Kiki Smith (1997)



Ana Mendieta's *Cosmetic Facial Variations* (1972)

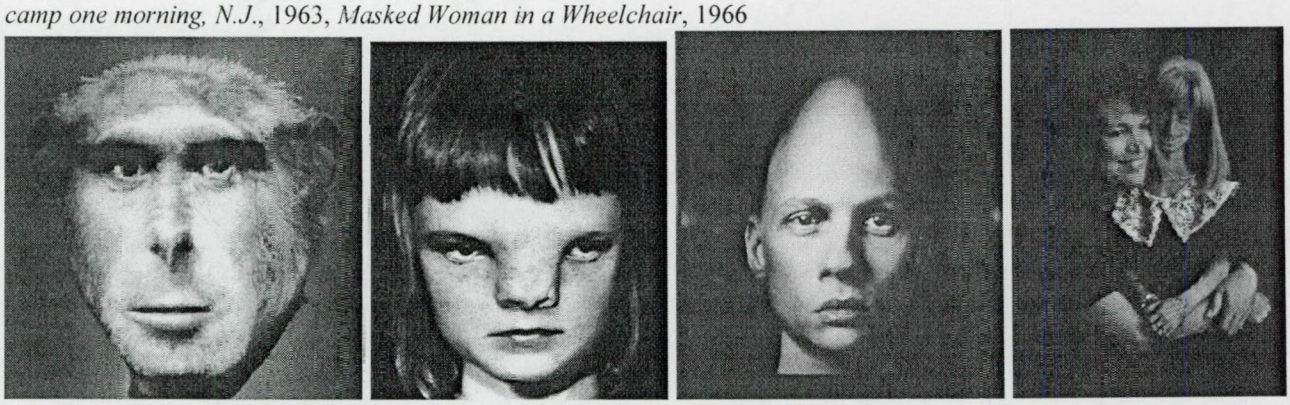


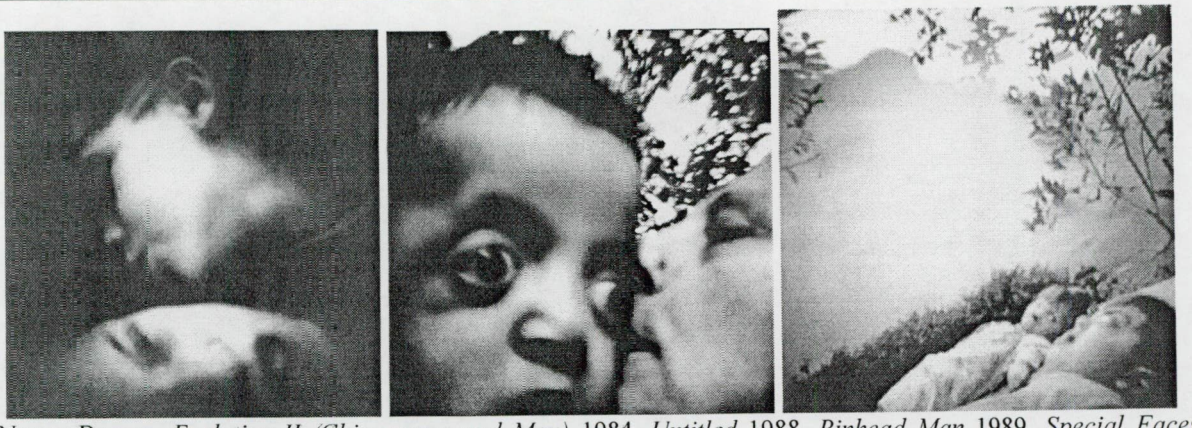
Lesley Dill's *A Word Made Flesh...Throat* (1994) and *Speaking Dress (Paris)* (1996), Gina Pane's *Death Control. Transit* (1975), and Marina Abramovic's *Missing Peace* (2004)

[146] I am indebted to Margery Amdur, professor of the University of New Mexico, plenary contributor to the 2003 Szeged Iconography of Gender conference, and an excellent artist herself, for advising me on some of these artists.

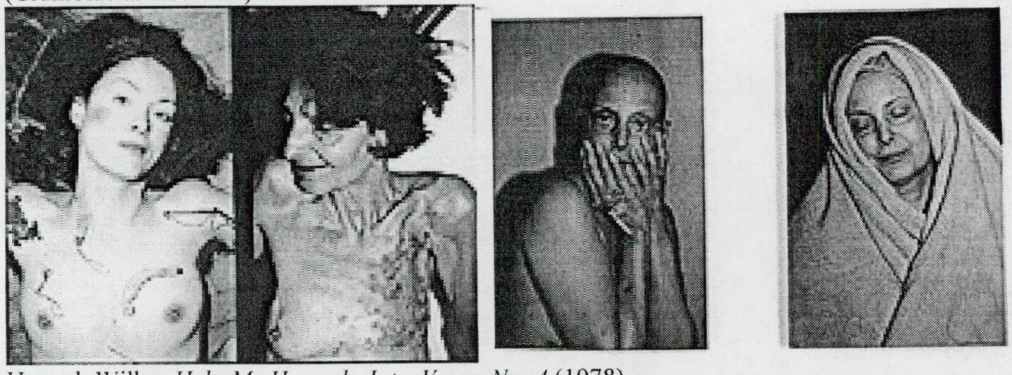
147

Diane Arbus' photos: *A young man in curlers at home on West 20th Street, N.Y.C.* 1966, *Hermaphrodite with Dog* 1968, *King and Queen of Senior Citizen's Dance in NYC*, 1970, *Identical Twins* 1967, *Untitled* 1962, *Jewish giant at home with his parents* 1970, *Child with toy hand-grenade in Central Park* 1962, *Retired man and his wife at home in a nudist camp one morning, N.J.*, 1963, *Masked Woman in a Wheelchair*, 1966



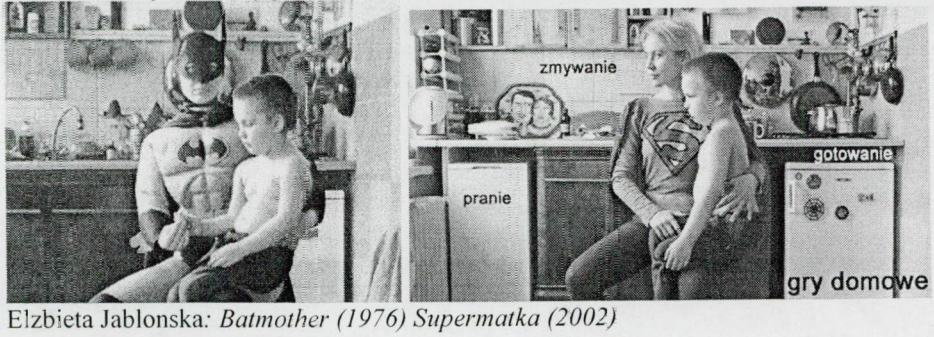


Nancy Burson, *Evolution II (Chimpanzee and Man)* 1984, *Untitled* 1988, *Pinhead Man* 1989, *Special Faces* (Craniofacial disorders) 1992-1993-1995



Hannah Wilke: *Help Me Hannah, IntraVenus No. 4* (1978)

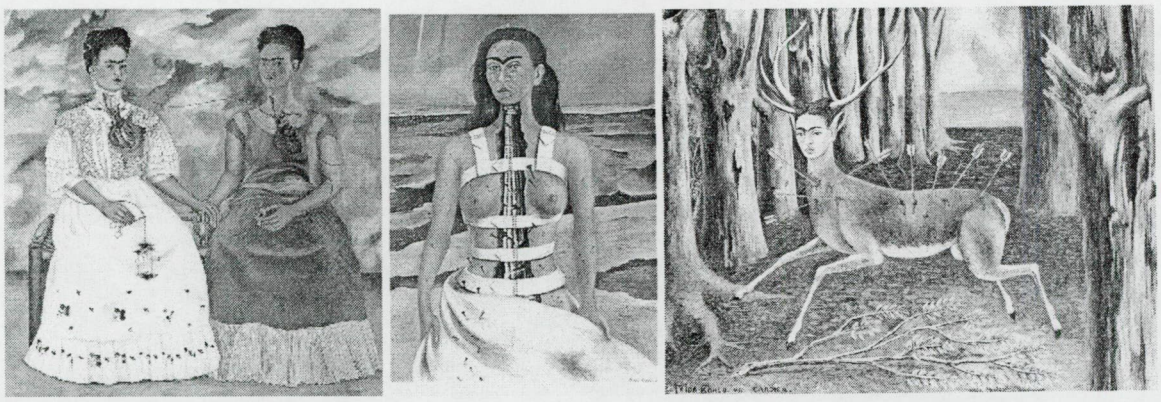
Diana Thorneycroft: *Self-portrait in a field of dolls, Self-portrait as a Man* 1989, *Mask* (1990)



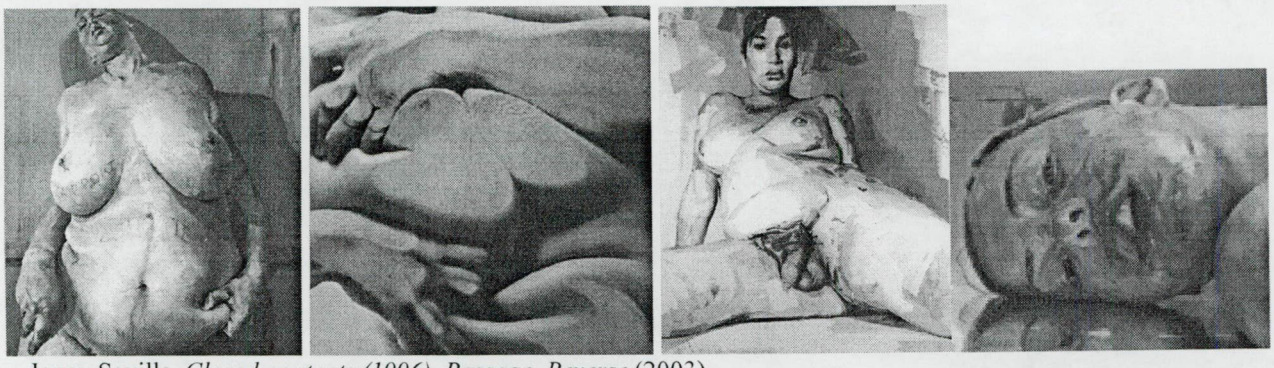
Elzbieta Jablonska*: Batmother (1976) Supermatka (2002)*

Nienke Klunder, *Sequences # 2, # 3*(extract from series) (200?)

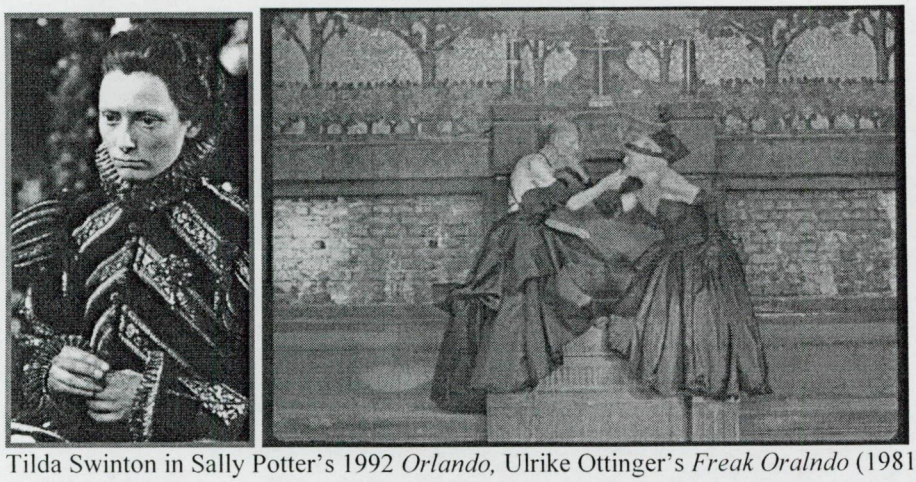
Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Self-portraits.* History series(1996), Disaster series (1997), Clown Series (2003), Sex Pictures (1989)



147 Frida Kahlo, *Two Fridas* (1939), *Broken Spine* (1944), *Self-Portrait as Wounded Deer* (1946)



Jenny Saville, *Closed-contacts (1996)*, *Passage*, *Reverse* (2003)



Tilda Swinton in Sally Potter's 1992 *Orlando,* Ulrike Ottinger's *Freak Oralndo* (1981)

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